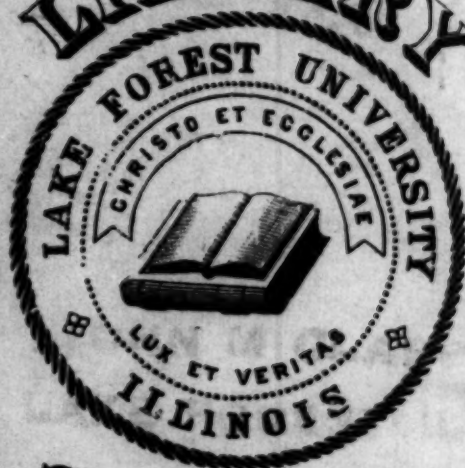


Oct 1891

LIBRARY

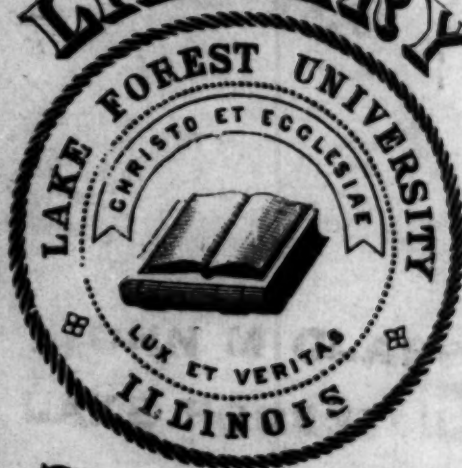


Presented By

Mr. Clapp

Chapman

LIBRARY



Presented By

Mr. Clapp

C 141.55.6.

THE
WEDDING RING;
OR,
HISTORY
OF
MISS SIDNEY.

THE
WEDDING RING

OF
HISTORICAL

OF
MISS SIDNEY

T H E
W E D D I N G R I N G ;
O R ,
H I S T O R Y
O F
M I S S S I D N E Y .

In a Series of L E T T E R S .

In T H R E E V O L U M E S .

V O L . I .

L O N D O N :

Printed for F. NOBLE, near MIDDLE ROW, HOL-
BORN; and J. NOBLE, in St. MARTIN'S COURT,
St. MARTIN'S LANE.

MDCCCLXXIX.

1779
29266

WEDDING RING

LIST OF

MISS D. N. E. Y.

In a Series of LETTERS

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOLUME I

NEW YORK: PUBLISHED BY J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO., 15 N. 2ND ST. 1854.

B^{CL}

305 75

P R E F A C E.

MR. ADDISON, in his first Spectator, by a remark of the following purport; "That a reader seldom peruses a book with pleasure, until he knows whether the writer of it is of a dark or fair complexion;

vi P R E F A C E.

“ plexion; whether of a mild or choleric disposition; and whether he is married or single.” And I have myself known some who have carried this peculiarity of humour so far, as to be uneasy if they were not made acquainted with the age and sex of the writer; whether the work was written in London or the country; whether the motive for writing was to pass an idle hour away, or to purchase a dinner; whether it was written at the importunity of a friend, or whether the author’s natural temper and inclination directed the choice of the subject. But to such readers as are of a

less

P R E F A C E. vii

less inquisitive turn, it will be sufficient to say, that the writer of the following work is a woman; that so far from publishing her present condition, she is determined to remain unknown; that she writes not from views of *interest*, and has no desire of *fame*; and that her motives are founded on more enlarged and more commendable principles. She hopes, indeed, that what she has written may prove an instructive entertainment to young persons, who may not always be so innocently amused as in reading books of a *moral* tendency (for, though a
novel,

novel, it lays claim to that distinction); and that they would profit by that excellent moral it recommends — a perfect reliance on the SUPREME BEING in every distress and danger.

THE AUTHOR.

THE

THE
WEDDING RING;
OR,
HISTORY
OF
MISS SIDNEY.

Miss WOODLEY to Miss SIDNEY.

Woodley House.

YOUR mother going to be married!---impossible!---O, my Lucy, imagine my astonishment! imagine that, for one whole hour, after I received your

VOL. I.

B

wonderful

2 THE WEDDING RING ; OR,

wonderful letter, which contained this amazing event, I sat almost petrified with consternation : then, starting, I exclaimed with Hamlet.

“ Frailty, thy name is Woman ! ”

I cannot help feeling a thousand fears on this occasion for my lovely friend. Perhaps these astonishing nuptials may be the cause of your family leaving this part of the country for ever, and residing at the seat of this unaccountable father-in-law, whose name I am crazy to hear. O, my beloved Lucy, I cannot support the thought of your leaving Ash Park. Those sweet retreats, the hermitage, the grotto, the ivy bower, and
all

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 3

all our old haunts, sacred to the most unbounded friendship, which ever filled the spotless minds of two innocent girls, perpetually rush into my mind.

My aunt has just been telling me (and my poor heart is breaking at the sad intelligence) that lady Sidney, her future spouse, and, consequently my Lucy, are to reside at least two hundred miles from hence, in the most distant part of the county of Northumberland: but heaven forbid!

You beg me not to blame your mother for taking this rash, this surprising step; but though, as your mother-in-law, you justly observe, she needs not

4 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

beaccountable to any one for her actions; yet, my dear, the world, depend on it, will both blame and wonder.---Good heavens!--she cannot, I am convinced, plead the frailty of youth.--I feel for the memory of your most worthy father, Sir Jasper Sidney; whose virtues, whose uncommon merits, are still in the mouth of all who knew him.---True it is, that she has hitherto behaved to you with at least a shew of affection, and even tenderness; but, alas! this step cancels every thing of that kind.---I fear, I greatly fear, that, as your fond, your indulgent father left his large fortune entirely at her disposal, this rash action of her's may affect your future prospects. But I will not anticipate misfortunes,

tunes, nor take "up sorrow upon interest."

I have ten thousand questions to ask.-- For goodness sake, who, or what is this man, to whom you are to bow your knee, and ask his blessing?---But I take it for granted, he is some neighbouring justice of the quoram, or perhaps some venerable baronet, in a snuff-coloured coat, black velvet breeches, and a grizzle wig of the first magnitude, and of the most *feathery* construction.---Or perhaps he may chuse to make his first appearance in what is called, a *bob major*, with two dangling ear-curls.---Some hobbling old man, I'll lay my life.

B 3

O Lucy!

6 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

O Lucy! I die for a *tete à tete*;---but that is, at present, absolutely impracticable; as my uncle (who is now laid up with his annual fit of the gout, and enjoying all the dignity of that distemper) is, if possible, as well as my unkind aunt, more tyrannical than ever to your poor Harriet.---I write this with the utmost difficulty, by stealth, whilst my uncle is dozing in his chair. You, my dear, have time to write: I therefore insist upon knowing all you can communicate by letter; don't fail to be *very* minute.---Am I not the friend of your heart, and therefore most intimately concerned in all that gives you pain, or pleasure? and am I not a woman, and consequently inquisitive? Indeed I

am

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 7

am at this moment on the very tenter-hooks of female curiosity; make haste, and satisfy then the impatient heart of your anxious friend.

You beg me not to think *lightly* of the woman who, for the ten last years of your life, has been to you a kind mother.---I must be frank, and tell the truth, that she is greatly sunk in my opinion. Among other matters you will tell me how this *tender* affair commenced; and in what manner the good lady broke the matter to her charming daughter; for, upon my word, I really think it required a *few* excuses to be made:---but your ideas of gra-
B 4 titude

8 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
titude and duty, and so forth, really
exceed all.

This moment my uncle is waking,
so I must break off, with begging you
to forgive every flippancy that has dropt
from the pen of your saucy,

But most tenderly affectionate,

HARRIET WOODLEY.



Miss

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 9

Miss SIDNEY to Miss WOODLEY.

Asb Park.

YES, my Harriet, I will write,---I will confide to thy faithful bosom, every hope, wish, or joy, which arises in mine; but be my sorrows all my own. I must not, indeed I cannot (for no language can paint it) describe what I feel for this surprising, this astonishing step of---still let me give her the tender appellation of mother, in which amiable character she has, certainly, till this ridiculous affair, not been defective.---O, my Harriet, what heart-felt pangs does the general ridicule,

10 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

which this step must necessarily occasion, give to your Lucy! I have hardly closed my eyes since the affair was disclosed; or if I have, my poor departed father's image rises to my view.---But before I proceed, I must express my perfect disapprobation of the manner of your mentioning this once-worthy woman. Indeed, Harriet, you will highly offend me if you ever from this day forward treat the affair in a ludicrous light; the world I know will sneer, and be witty enough, on the occasion, but let my Harriet not join with *that world*, but with her poor Lucy, in pitying a misled woman; who, to me, has ever behaved with affection and propriety. O, my friend, my heart bleeds
for

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. II

for her extreme---what shall I call it?
folly, surely, is too soft a term:---it
cannot be called *love*, for at her age

“ The heyday of the blood

“ Is cool and waits upon the judgement.”

Neither can it be ambition.---Her jointure of at least two thousand pounds a year with a large sum my poor father left in the funds, and an estate besides, of a considerable value, she has the whole enjoyment of, and every penny of it is at her own disposal. My poor father, who doated on her, little imagining she would ever take so rash a step, left her his *all*, and your Harriet dependant on her generosity; which

12 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

virtue he believed she possessed in a higher degree, than any woman living. I have had, as you know, a handsome yearly allowance for cloaths, and for a few charitable donations. On the death of my mother (had not this wonderful event happened) I should most undoubtedly have been possessed of all her large fortune. 'Tis true, there is no fear of her *increasing* her family; but by this step, I certainly shall find a more precarious dependance, than if this father-in-law had never been introduced.

You talk, my Harriet, of being petrified with astonishment on the first news of this affair; but what will be
your

your amazement when I tell you, that the future spouse of my mother, is no old hobbling justice with a snuff coloured coat, and a gold-headed cane;—neither will he make his appearance in a grizzle wig, or a bob-major.---What think you of a young gay baronet of six and twenty---true, as you are alive ---with a fortune of at least two thousand pounds a year, a most noble seat, park, &c. in the north of England, besides great plantations in the sugar islands, which bring him in a clear thousand a year?---What say you now, my dear?---for my part my amazement is so great, that I have hardly recovered my faculties sufficiently to inform you (what you are anxious to know)

14 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

know) in what manner my mother revealed the astonishing news.

I had observed, for some time before, she had received several letters, which she frequently read over, and often seemed deeply lost in thought; all which I ascribed to some business I knew she had with her lawyer: but on Saturday last, as I was playing on the harpsichord, she entered the room with a kind of *smirking* air, and sat herself by my side. She desired me to play a favourite lesson of Abel's, which I did. When I had finished, she wished I had a masterly hand to accompany me in the violin parts of those charming sonatas.---I told her, I wished so too.

Upon

Upon which, with a kind of half smile, and an awkward, *downcast* look, affecting some confusion, she told me it would not be long, perhaps, before I should have the finest hand in England *always* to accompany me.---I started.---“ Always, madam, did you say?” I felt my face in a glow. We girls, my dear, immediately have the idea of a *husband* in our heads.---Indeed, what she said was enough to alarm me.--I began bridling, and was going to give myself a few airs on the occasion, and was just going to begin with, “ Indeed, madam, I am too young to think of any such thing.--- I have no thoughts of settling.” All this I was preparing to utter, when my blushes would give me leave. In the
interim,

16 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
interim, behold it came out!--But to
save the repetition of, says she, and says
I, you shall have the dialogue, verba-
tim, which passed between this unac-
countable mother and her astonished
daughter.

After twenty times hemming, and
adjusting her handkerchief she began.

“ Yes, Lucy, I repeat, you will now
have your taste for music (already charm-
ing as it is) even improved by a friend of
mine.---A friend, I say,---a nearer rela-
tion than perhaps you dream of.”

“ A nearer relation, madam! what can
you mean?” Here my face was the co-
lour of scarlet.

“ Why

“Why, child,---not to keep you in suspense---I have long been going to tell you---but---don’t be surpris’d.---Indeed, my Lucy, *your* interest is at the bottom, I assure you.---It will be the means of enlarging your acquaintance with some of the most noble families in England, besides augmenting my own fortune, which, however, I thank heaven, is a very good one---in short, don’t be surpris’d---but I have some thoughts of---of”---

“Of what, madam?---you beg me not to be surpris’d---but what am I to expect from this alarming preface?”

“Alarming

18 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

“ Alarming preface, Lucy ?---stranger things have come to pass.---In short, I have had---have had an offer so very advantageous,---the gentleman’s character so very unexceptionable,---his worth and accomplishments, in this age, so different from---that, in short---I---I have given my consent---and in about a month,”---

“ Good god, madam! (your poor Lucy---was still deceived) let me chuse for myself;---let me be first acquainted with the man that you have looked out for my husband;---don’t precipitate me I beg into a state which requires---”

Your

"*Your* husband, child?---"

"Why, madam, whose husband else can you possibly mean?"---said I, trembling with amazement.

"Whose husband, Lucy?---(simpering) whose husband?---suppose I was to tell you my own?---Many women---more advanced in years---"

"O heavens! madam!---" Falling back in my chair, and having hardly strength left sufficient to feel for my faults.

"I thought, indeed, Lucy, you would
be

be a little surpris'd.---But the character of the man is so very unexceptionable,---”

“ A *little* surpris'd !---I am indeed *greatly* so.---” Indeed I was transfixed with wonder.

“ And why, child, should you express such infinite astonishment? Mrs. Lowther and lady Dormer, both married at a more advanced age than myself. ---I am barely turned of fifty (not above ten years, thought I.) ’Tis true, I shall marry a man much younger than myself, and the world will be *witty*, I suppose, upon the occasion:---but I shall despise its censures.---As to age,
my

my constitution is so good, many women of forty appear older than myself; and (*bridling* excessively) my person, in the former part of my life, was thought so good (this was true enough, for my poor father married her for her beauty) that *time* has, as yet, made no ravages very considerable in my form."

"O, madam, I was not thinking of your person.---But, pray, who is the gentleman?---you certainly have a right to bestow your hand on whom you please."

"It will not be bestowed, Lucy, to your detriment---depend on that.---The gentleman is Sir Harry Beaumont."

---You

22 THE WEDDING RING;

---You know, my dear, I went to Bath about three months ago, to see a sick relation; your then ill health would not permit your going with me. At Bath, I saw, and became acquainted with this agreeable man:---part of the time he indeed lodged in the house.---An acquaintance commenced; soon after which he offered me his hand in the most generous and explicit terms. Indeed, my dear Lucy, I have a hundred *good* reasons for taking this step, as you shall hear."

Ah, madam, thought I, when once a man, or woman, is going to marry absurdly, a thousand *wise* reasons are always assigned, why it was even *absolutely*

solutely necessary.---Sometimes they marry for the sake of having a friend about them---Sometimes to advance their fortune, and sometimes for the good of their children. In short, they are always conscious their extreme folly requires some kind of justification. However, this I did not say, and she continued.

“ A very material reason for this marriage is *your* future happiness in life, my dear Lucy.”

“ *My* happiness, madam ! for heaven’s sake don’t let me be the cause of your taking a step, which---”

“ Yes,

“ Yes, child, you will, from my connexion with this worthy young man, become soon acquainted with some of the best and most noble families in England.---You must be unavoidably introduced to his relations.---The duke of D--- is his uncle;---the countess of R--- his aunt.---I shall have my Lucy become a dutchess, perhaps, by this union.---I have never yet had a house in town, which now I shall have.---A single woman cannot, nor is it fitting she should, live with that *éclat*, which a married one does.---I fancy, child, your little heart must beat, when it reflects on the pomp and elegant amusements we shall enjoy half the year in Hanover Square.

I shall have you introduced at court too
 ---In fine, I could give you an hundred,
 nay, a thousand wise reasons why this
 step is the most *prudent* one that I ever
 took in my life."

"But, madam---(bursting into tears,
 my heart torn with anguish for the me-
 mory of my poor father)---you are cer-
 tainly to take what step you please;
 ---but, for heaven's sake do not make
 my future happiness and welfare, the *cause*
 of your marriage."

"My marriage (she interrupted) will
 be productive of many advantageous
 circumstances in your favour. Being
 entirely my *own* mistress, I have nobody

to consult, in this matter---my own will is sufficient. But, depend on it, Lucy, your fortune will not be hurt by this match: whenever you marry, Sir Harry and I, knowing your father left *every* thing in *my* disposal, will do, you may be sure, what is perfectly handsome."

There was something, I thought, in the conclusion of her last speech, so very ungenerous in reminding me of my dependant state on her, and her future spouse, that I again burst into tears.

"I will retire, if you please, madam, for an hour to my chamber."

"Do,

“ Do, child, and to-morrow we will talk of patterns of silks, of a new equipage, and a hundred things.---Here, you may read Sir Harry’s letter which I received last night, in which he is so impatient, and so importunate for an early day, that, I really believe, in my conscience, I shall accept of his hand in less than three weeks.---Here, you *shall* read his letter.”---Offering it to my acceptance.

“ No, Madam,---no :---I have not the least curiosity.---I wish you, and Sir Harry Beaumont, all possible happiness.”

“ Ay, Lucy,---we shall have twenty
C 2 happy

happy schemes together ; and my house (for I shall not visit the North, where Sir Harry has a noble seat called Beaumont Castle, this summer) will be filled with different parties of company.--- You will now, child, see the world, and be introduced into the *Beau Monde* : ---You are too fine a young woman to spend all your days at Ash Park."

I heard no more ; but, hastily withdrawing, flew up to my apartment, and burst into an agony of tears.---The glaring imprudence of my mother's conduct, appeared to me in its proper colours ;---and to make *me* appear the real cause of her foolish marriage filled me with indignation. ---I rang my bell for
a little

a little hartshorn and water.---Just as my faithful old servant Martha, who has bred me up from my infancy was entering, she heard me exclaim, "O, my poor, my dearest father, could you but know this strange event, how would you pity your dependent daughter!

Martha conjectured at once the true cause of my weeping.

"Alas! my dear young lady, I guess you now know the strange news of my lady being going to be married.---It has been the common talk among the servants for this last month.---Well,---for my part---Good gracious! if my poor master could look out of his grave,
 C. 3 what

what would *he* say to it?---Peter, who was with my lady at Bath, saw this fine young gentleman: and Peter says, he is very handsome indeed, and covered with lace from head to foot.---Well, there is no accounting for this love---it does what it pleases with us."

Martha, who is a virgin with at least fifty years over her head, saw not, perhaps, the glaring impropriety of this step in the same light I did.

"Aye," continued she, "this love, as I said before, is an unaccountable thing ---it turns every thing topsyturvy."

To stop her prate, I ordered her to bring my hat, intending to amuse my
mind

mind with a solitary walk to the hermitage; for I thought, on many accounts, it would be highly wrong in me to let it appear to the family that I confined myself to my apartment, shut up in grief on this account: I therefore, wiping my eyes, told Martha I had no doubt but this gentleman was a very worthy man, and that my mother had certainly a right to please herself.

I took a solitary walk to the hermitage, a spot I look upon as sacred, as in that sequestered, sweet retreat my dear father spent many of his choicest hours that were devoted to study and contemplation. I wept afresh at the remembrance of that tender parent;

32 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

but found my mind much calmed from
the stillness of the evening, the distant
murmur of the cascade, the plaintive
notes of a mournful stock-dove-- all
conspired to sooth my melancholy.

" These are the haunts of meditation, these
" The scenes where ancient bards th' inspiring
breath

" Extatic felt; and, from the world retir'd,
" Convers'd with angels, and with heavenly
forms,

" On gracious errand bent : to save the fall

" Of virtue struggling on the brink of vice,

" To hint pure thoughts, and warm the favour'd
soul,

" For future trials fated to prepare."

On my return through the winding
valley

valley which leads to this solitary spot, I met a poor sick beggar woman with a wretched little infant at her back, and a ragged little boy running at her side.

“ Sharp misery had worn her to the bone.”

Heavens! thought I, is it not most ungrateful, is it not arraigning the Most High, to look upon myself as miserable, who am blest with affluence, health, youth and strength? and ought I not to be ashamed of repining at *imaginary* evils, when I see so much real misery before me? alas! the poor shivering wretch and her helpless little ones, in want of every common refreshment, are truly objects of substan-

34 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

tial misery, and worthy of sincere compassion. Alas! what are my fantastic woes, compared to that piercing grief this poor wretch must endure whilst her babes are crying for bread?

I entered into conversation with the miserable woman, and whilst the tear of pity glistened in my eye, was thankful to heaven, that I had it in my power to afford her, by giving all the silver I had in my pocket, at least a few temporary comforts. Unfortunately I had left my purse at home, but by some means a straggling half guinea I found, in one corner of my pocket. Rejoiced at the discovery, I called the poor woman back, who burst into tears of joy
on

on my putting it in her hand, and we parted.

O, my Harriet! what delight can equal the rapture of relieving a fellow-creature in distress!

I entered the gloomy valley, which leads to the solitary hermitage, with peevish melancholy, discontent, and repinings; but on my return, every thing around me seemed to wear a brighter aspect.--- Good heavens! thought I, teach me to be ashamed of calling those trifling incidents, *afflictions*; which, in fact, are wholly owing to my own petulance, my own peevish pride.

For heaven's sake, my friend, keep to yourself my secret repinings on account of this affair of my mother. Have I not been over *pert* on the occasion? she certainly has an undoubted right to act as she pleases:---and yet, I think, I pretended to talk of giving myself airs of indignation. I am ashamed of my behaviour.---She has ever to me behaved as a kind mother; and shall I at once condemn her for the one only real act of folly I ever knew her commit? I will *pity*, my Harriet, her imprudence, but never *ridicule* it. I will endeavour to conquer this proud heart of mine, and to teach it duty and obedience.

And

HISTORY OF Miss SIDNEY.

And after all, my dear, however this marriage may prove, my happiness cannot be much affected by it :---and whilst I can look forward to a world beyond this dim spot, for perfect felicity till that happy period,

————— “Thou great intelligence supreme,
“Sovereign director of this mighty frame,
“On thee, with patience firm, I will rely,
“Bless'd in the care of thy approving eye.”

Is there no possibility of our meeting?---But five miles asunder,---and yet no hopes of an interview, during this unlucky gout of your uncle!---Can't you contrive to steal out, with your maid, for an hour some evening? ---and I will meet you at the *stile*, in
the

38 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

the elm grove; or at the Three Oaks, at the bottom of the hill.---but no--on second thoughts, you had better not attempt it; so let us scribble on, and be contented we have *that* happiness in our power.

Adieu, my sweet Friend,

Ever Yours,

LUCY SIDNEY.

P. S. The handsomest man in England this Sir Harry Beaumont!---Is my poor mother mad?---Surely she cannot be in her proper senses!---Can a *title* have any weight?---O Woman!
Woman!

HISTORY OF Miss SIDNEY. 39

Woman ! well may indeed the other sex
hold us in the light they do.---What !
again is my *pertness* flowing to my
pen ? down, down, stubborn heart, and
learn duty and obedience.



Captain

40 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

Captain M'DANIEL to Patrick O'NEALE, Esq.

GOING to be married to an old toothless dowager of threescore! Is it--can it be possible?---thy last shift, thy last resource, I knew would be a halter, or the marriage noose. I direct this to our old haunt in Covent garden.---But where the devil do you hide yourself? I have searched every bagnio in town and cannot find you.---Mother Harris has indeed at last told me, that she hears you are going to be--curse the word---*married*.---When I went last to Ireland with my regiment, I left you at your apartments in the Fleet.--I long to know how you managed that ugly, unlucky business

business of the bank notes.---Ah, Patrick! thy insatiable fondness for the sex, will at last be thy ruin,---as in justice it ought; for *you* have ruined (as it is called) more fine girls than ever fell to the lot of one man before.---Be thankful that the foolish affair of that rape of yours, at Dublin, went off as it did.---But is this marriage of thine all a confounded lye, or can any woman living be so drawn in?---'Tis true, thy handsome person and insinuating address may do wonders; especially when they are accompanied with so unparalleled an impudence as thou art blessed withal. But an old woman! 'sdeath! Had it been a young girl, it would have been *more* excusable. But
 where

where didst thou raise money sufficient to furnish thee for such an enterprise as this? Great must be the expence for dress, for equipage and all that “Charms frail woman’s eye?” How soon was the fortune squander’d your good uncle left you!---Spent every farthing of it, upon women, wine, and every fashionable extravagance---since which I am puzzled to know how you supported yourself. ---Dice---and the four aces, have, I suppose, enabled thee to cut a figure for a few weeks sometimes; but, after all, the life of a gambler, (for thine has been no better) is often apt to be subject to a few disagreeable circumstances, as duns, discoveries, and so forth.---I have heard a confused kind
of

of report, that you have been personating, at Bath, a feigned character.---Be merry, but wise---beware of detection before you have brought matters to bear; and marry this old woman, if she has good store of pelf, as soon as you can, though you break her neck the next morning.---Her heart, I am sure, you soon will.

Adieu.---Send me a particular account of the plan of your operations. Direct to be left at our old *mother's*, in the Little Piazza, Covent Garden.---This is all at present from thy

Brother in Iniquity,

JOHN M'DANIEL.

Patrick

Patrick O'NEALE, to Captain M'DANIEL.

WHAT a letter hast thou written! But I hasten to desire you to be more careful in your style, when you write again to a young baronet, who has lately taken upon him the title of Sir Henry Beaumont, with an improving estate of upwards of two thousand pounds a year, a fine seat in the north of England, and a large fortune in the Sugar Islands.—But to be serious for one moment. I am in a week to be married to an old woman of threescore: but, ah, Jack, Jack; she has a most noble estate, besides upwards of ten thousand

thousand pounds in the funds, a magnificent old seat, and fine park, which I shall soon reduce into ready rhino. In short, I am mad; downright mad with joy. --- Such an event! --- It exceeds even the most sanguine hopes of the most impudent fellow breathing. Your penetration will lead you to guess who that is. In short, I found a jail or a wife must inevitably be my fate, and so I chose the latter as the lesser evil of the two. About a twelvemonth ago I had a near chance of carrying off a fine young girl of twenty thousand pounds, but her old cautious uncle soon discovered the cheat, and my scheme proved impracticable; so that I was obliged to shift my quarters; and glad was I to escape

escape as I did, and determining never to have any thing more to do with heireffes. In those cases there is always such a cursed parcel of maiden aunts, trustees, guardians, &c. that a poor young fellow, in my situation, stands in a very dangerous predicament with them all. I therefore prudently determined to make a *rich* widow my game: one who had a large jointure in her own hands, and who had no *prying* relations, either to inspect into the state of my finances, or criticize her conduct. But to proceed to the glorious point I have in view. About four months since I had luckily an opportunity (*how* is not material) to be master of five hundred pounds. Perhaps I had a lucky throw

at

at the gaming table: but let that pass. Well, down I flew to Bath, equipped in the genteelest taste, determined at all events to *fasten* on a rich widow, and as *women* are fond of *title*, I, in order to further my honourable designs, took upon me, the name and character of Sir Harry Beaumont: and here I was careful not to personate any real person.

By means of my servants (all smart fellows, in elegant liveries) Sir Harry Beaumont was soon reported to be arrived. I frequented the rooms a few nights to reconnoitre the women. So handsome a fellow (I have no vanity thou knowest) set all the young girls
in

48 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

in a flame : but I was for “ metal more attractive ;” and, by the luckiest chance in the world, happened to lodge in the very house with *just* the rich, *independent* widow I wanted for my purpose : --- a Mrs. Sidney. Her husband (a country squire) has been dead these ten years; during which period she has remained at her seat in the West of England; consequently knows not much of the gay world. By means of a female friend, I got introduced into her parties. Thou knowest my impudence; thou knowest my handsome face and address would deceive the very devil. I sigh’d --- I ogled --- I wrote: but I found my conquest not very difficult.

“ O Woman, simple, shallow, changing woman!”

I will

I will not, Jack, lose my time on any thing so trite, so tiresome, as the worn-out subject of the conquest of that weakest of all created beings, a Woman. Suffice it to say, I only met with the usual few squeamish exclamations: such as, "Lord, Sir Harry, "you are so impatient! What will the "world say? I have indeed no person "to whom I need be accountable for "my actions; but —"

"Nor have I, my amiable Mrs. Sidney, any friends to consult on the occasion (this was true thou knowest) I offer my person (such as it is) my fortune, which is independent, and daily improving, to your acceptance.

VOL. I.

D

You

50 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

You shall make your own terms, madam. I am connected nearly to some of the noblest families in Great Britain: and if you think the county of Northumberland too much *out* of the world, we will reside part of our time at your seat in the country. Only as I shall soon be in parliament (do you not think this a master piece, Jack?) I must be every winter in town; but, my charming woman, (every woman fancies she has still some charms on this side sixty) the country is my chief delight. Few young men, I believe, are so fond of retirement as myself. (Don't you adore, me Jack?) Books---the *fine arts*, as musick---painting.--Do you play, Mrs. Sidney?" continued I, tenderly pressing her hand.

"I am

"I am excessively fond of music, she replied; but I don't myself perform on any instrument.---I have a daughter---who excels on the harpsichord."---

"A daughter, madam!---O Jack, I felt my heart *throb*, at even the idea of a young girl in the same house.--Is Miss here, madam?"--- Carelessly.

"No, Sir, she is not."

"She is but a child, I imagine, madam."--- Affecting the most careless air.

"O Sir, no---she is turned of nine-
D 2 teen.

teen.---A very good girl---and she is thought handsome."

"Then I am sure (interrupted I) she is thought to resemble you." She smiled.---O vain woman! but it is the sex.

"Why no---she is not indeed my own daughter, but by a former wife of my poor good Mr, Sidney, who left her entirely in my power as to fortune. She has been a very obedient, dutiful child; and if, Sir Harry, I really do take this strange step you are going to precipitate me into"---(here I caught her to my breast) "I must insist on her being permitted every indulgence with which she

she has hitherto been used to. My Lucy is very dear to me."

Oh! how the subject of a *girl*, warmed my heart!---I stooped down to conceal my emotion.---"And, as your daughter, madam, she will be always dear to me" (so she shall Jack.)---"I think you said she was musical.---I have some execution and taste on the violin, and shall be happy to accompany Miss Sidney.---And indeed, when I made the *tour* of Italy, I picked up many curious manuscripts in music.---In short, my instructions in that art, or in any other of the fine arts, she may always command."---But I thought it best not to dwell longer on this subject, for fear the

54 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

old lady should smoke me. She has been handsome, I fancy, thirty years ago, and is still strait, and tall. To be brief, I entirely gained her consent to make me (the old cant word) the *happiest* of men---indeed I defy any woman to refuse me,---A tender pressure of the hand---eyes, taught to deceive---and a few warm kisses, soon did my business. In ten days from hence, I am to set out for Ash Park, the seat of my adorable widow; when and where the irrevocable knot is to be tied: my servants, all chosen men for this purpose, in flaming liveries; myself, lolling in an elegant post coach and four.---I shall carry down with me my *attorney* (*honest* Tom King, lately waiter at the Bedford

ford Coffee House) who with the utmost solemnity will produce the *writings* of my *estates*, and settle with her lawyer (a poor country put, I doubt not) all the necessary preliminaries. This fellow I carry with me is admirable at a business of this kind. I defy any attorney in England to deceive with a more specious face, and that is a bold word. This affair of the writings, as it is the most dangerous to bring on a discovery, so it required such a fellow as Tom to manage it. You would die to see him in a large grizzle wig, a dark brown coat of the most formal cut, broad gold laced waistcoat, an enormous gold-headed cane, with every other outward appearance of what is called, a warm,

56 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

substantial man of eminence in his profession; his mouth pursed up, and a man of but very few words, for more reasons than one. I shall carry down with me, likewise, Frank Mills (formerly a pimp to lord M---), who is to pass for a colonel Campley, an officer of distinction, and a distant relation of mine; and as such, he is to perform the office of giving the lady *away* (as it is called) at the *awful* ceremony. This step I chose, as the more of my *own people* I have about me, the less liable shall I be to a discovery. And now, Jack, fall down, and worship me for my contrivances.

But this girl, this handsome daughter,

runs

runs in my head.---Ah, Jack, what a fortune (for my uncle left me a good one) have I squandered away, as thou observest, upon the dear creatures!--

Kitty Parsons was a most expensive hussy: the most so of any woman I ever kept, which has been no small number, you know.---Let me see:---Lucy Sid-

ney! *Sidney*!--Good heavens, M'Daniel, this very girl do I remember at Bath near a twelvemonth ago.---The finest

creature in England! such eyes, such lips!--I am mad to see her.---I remem-

ber I saw her dancing at a ball---and

saw her, I now recollect, with this very

old hag I am going to *call* my wife.---

You say, you should not wonder if I

was going to be married to a young

girl---Ah, Jack! I shall have this Lucy in my possession, and as much my *own* as my fond soul can wish, before I am a month older.---I am not going to moralize---but the women, it is too fatal a truth to be disputed, always prefer a *rake* to a *sober* fellow.---What a glorious scheme!---the mother I marry for her money---the daughter I will enjoy for my pleasure; and, "She is food for Jove."---Never fear but I shall have my amusements at Ash Park.---I never yet was disappointed of any girl I was determined to carry: and if I find this reluctant, a little gentle *art* may not be amiss.---Farewell. I may soon perhaps have some occasion for thy help.

Be

HISTORY OF Miss SIDNEY. 59

Be cautious how you write---remember *who*, and *what* I am.---I must begin my *operations* at Ash Park with great circumspection.

Adieu, ever thine,

P. O'NEALE.



Miss SIDNEY, to Miss WOODLEY.

At Park.

AT length, my sweet friend, the day is fixed, when my mother is to give her hand to Sir Harry Beaumont: may it be productive of every possible happiness. I fancy, really my dear, they may and will live very comfortably together. I find Sir Harry is fond of retirement, and has a great taste for books, music and the fine arts. I shall teize him to death about drawing landscapes, in which my mother tells me he particularly excels, and in painting

ing in crayons likewise. Come, my dear, things may turn out better than I imagined, or than as your tender fears for my welfare suggested; but, after all, we girls are so mighty apt to judge!--I have, I confess, for my own part, been very pert, and self-conceited upon the occasion. I own I long to see this father-in-law of mine.--Some gawk kind of young man, I'll lay my life, who has seen nothing of the world.--Well--we shall see.--Sometimes I have a kind of melancholy foreboding, that hangs about my heart, for which I cannot account. But here comes my mother.

She

She has just presented me with a beautiful suit of point lace : and, from a letter she has just received, informs me Sir Harry will be here to morrow by dinner. I find he brings two gentlemen with him ; what preparations, and what a fuss does a wedding occasion ! ---Poor Old Peter's face is at least a yard long---you know he was my dear father's old butler,---and looks frightened at all these *new* doings:---but Martha diverts me, who is so elated with a wedding in the family, and gives me so many broad hints that *her's* will be next, that I really cannot forbear smiling---and then " her mistress will be a *lady*, a baronet's *lady*."---I fear that

title

title is often the source of much wretchedness.

* * * * *

The patterns of silks, my Harriet, you need not return. Think of my poor mother, who has fixt on the *pink* and *silver*, to *sit* up in, to receive her company!--I have only chosen a slight lustring for that occasion.---My heart will be too much oppressed to suffer me to take any joy in finery, whilst my mother is making herself the subject of ridicule to all the county.---Ah, Harriet! that painful thought will recur.

I will not dispatch this, till I have given you my opinion of Sir Harry.

A^s

64 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

As he is to arrive to-morrow, I will then
finish my epistle :---so adieu, my dear,
for this night.

The patterns of silk, my friend,
you need not return. Think of my
poor mother, who has far on the road
and means to sit up in to receive her
company. I shall not be a night
joining for the reason.---My heart
will be too much distressed to think
of to take any joy in it. My
mother is making herself the subject of
ridicule to all the company.---Ah, Har-
riet! that painful thought will recur.

I will not dispatch this till I have
given you my opinion of Sir Harry.

The

A

The Same, to the Same, in Continuation.

WELL, my Harriet, we are all here in the highest order, expecting this future father of mine. My mother just now looked in upon me.---
“For ever scribbling child? said she, you will not be dressed in time.” She, however, has taken care not to be too late herself in this particular, having been rustling about in a pale pink lustring negligee for these three hours;---her hair excessively powdered (I will not add to conceal the effects of *time*) a most elegant kind of hood; and a chip hat ornamented with a profusion
of

66 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

of pink ribbon. I have not a grain of alacrity this day about me----a kind of stupid weight hangs on my senses. ---Yet, seriously, I must set about dressing; but first I will feed my birds.

* * * * *

Bless me! here they come indeed! O Harriet, what would I give for you at this moment!---one--two--three outriders;---post coach and four;---postillions in scarlet and gold;---and now, from my windows, I see Sir Harry alighting. Tall and genteel, but I cannot see his face. An officer in smart regimentals, and a grave looking gentleman make up the party. I shall not
make

HISTORY OF Miss SIDNEY. 67

make my appearance till just before dinner.

I am now retired to my closet and my pen. As to this Sir Harry Beaumont I cannot say I like him:--but, perhaps you will say, how can I form a judgement of any person in the hour of dining with him? True, my dear: but yet, I am convinced this man will never be much esteemed by your Lucy. He has the strangest look with his eyes! I never in my life saw such a look. I thought there was a kind of gravity and straint upon him, not natural to so young

young a man. Bless me, my dear, I don't suppose he is barely six and twenty. He is certainly very handsome; but most insufferably vain, self-sufficient, and conceited. This kind of character you know I detest. After dinner he flung himself into a hundred different attitudes, to shew his fine person, and as often affectedly smiled to display his white teeth. My poor mother!--O, Harriet, how did I suffer from the sneers I imagined I saw in the face of every servant present at dinner!--Sir Harry has brought an officer of great distinction with him;---a colonel Campley: nearly related I find to the duke of D--- as is likewise Sir Harry. This colonel, I think, is not so wellbred a man as one would

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 69

would expect, from his connexions with the fashionable world. But he has been abroad a good deal, I find, in the service of his king and country; as such I looked upon him in a very respectable light; otherwise I never saw a more disagreeable, bold kind of man. His hands are like those of a porter. But the man, after all, may be a good officer, though I am *pert* enough in pretending to give my opinion of him thus. But, good heavens! Harriet, the attorney (for such is the other gentleman the young baronet brought) is the strangest animal I ever saw. These lines of Shakespeare occurred to my mind.

"Aye

"Aye in the catalogue ye go for men,
 "As hounds, and greyhounds, mungrils,
 spaniels, curs,
 "Showghes, water-rugs, and demy wolves
 are clipt,
 "All by the name of dogs--and so of men."

My mother I saw, from a look she
 gave me, was displeased at my not hav-
 ing dressed better. I thought it would
 be highly ridiculous in me to *dizen* my-
 self out, as if I was to enter a ball-
 room. I had nothing on but my sprig'd
 muslin night-gown, a few flowers in
 my bosom, and my little chip hat, with
 the blue ribbons you gave me. My
 mother, before dinner, walked upon
 the terrace with her guests, where I
 joined

joined them. I had a small basket on my arm, in which I had been gathering flowers. I saw the strange *groupe* at the distance of the whole walk, so that I had a full view --- as indeed they had of me. Sir Harry, from his attitude, appeared to be saying soft things to my mother. On my approaching, she introduced him.

"Miss Sidney, this is Sir Harry Beaumont."

I curtsied, but said nothing. The man, I really thought, look'd disconcerted. --- He appears to be much delighted with Ash Park. --- To my mother

mother he behaved, all dinner-time, most surfeitingly assiduous; to me, with great formality; and yet with a careless air too, I cannot tell how.

After tea, I played on the harpsichord: the airs he gave himself about music, were intolerable. He has brought a violin, and a great deal of music. He played some difficult things, really with taste and execution, and I confess I am glad he is able to accompany me, as he shall *you*, likewise, when I am so happy to have you at Ash Park; we shall often, I dare say, make little concerts.---I have a confused notion I have seen this Sir Harry some-where:-- I think it was at a ball at Bath last year; and
if

if I am right in my conjecture, in that respect, I well remember I remarked him then for a most egregious fop.



The *lovers* are shut up in close conference, whilst I am scribbling nonsense: and, in the words of my favourite author, Pope, “thinking aloud” to my sweet friend.

To-morrow, Mr. Osborne, my mother’s lawyer is to come, and the writings are to be sign’d and seal’d. Don’t, my dear, be so apprehensive that my fortune will suffer by this imprudent step of my mother’s. Sometimes,

VOL. I.

E

times,

74 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

times, in an heroic mood, these charming lines of Thomson occur to my remembrance, which I venture to alter, in one line or two, to my own uncertain state.

"I care not, fortune, what you me deny ;

"You cannot rob me of free nature's grace ;

"You cannot shut the windows of the sky,

"Through which Aurora shews her brightening face ;

"You cannot bar my grateful heart to praise,

"My high creator's glorious works, and power :

"Let health my nerves, and finer fibres brace,

"And I their toys to the great children leave :

"Of fancy, reason, virtue, nought can me be-
seave."

The wedding is not to be public, and
there,

HISTORY OF Miss SIDNEY. 75

there, I think, the *lovers* shew their judgement. The day after to-morrow is to be---the *bappy* day.---Sincerely do I wish it may be productive of every felicity to the parties themselves but, ah, Harriet! I have had a sad presension, that it will prove a source of much wretchedness (though how at present I cannot conceive) to

Your ever tenderly affectionate

LUCY.

Patrick O'NEALE, to Captain M'DANIEL.

JOY!--with me joy, Jack!--I have been in possession of my charming bride--and all *thereunto belonging*, a week this day.--My companions in this iniquitous scene (for my conscience, seared as it is with a red-hot iron, sometimes gives me a cursed twinge) tell me I have *topped* my part to a miracle.---But pity me, my friend,---pity me; for I am absolutely surfeited with the fondness of this old woman.---But ah, Jack, this heavenly angel Lucy Sidney!---what language can be found to paint her enchanting form!---her lovely innocence!

the

she is, in one word, the *perfection* of all female beauty :---and by every *infernal* power I here swear, she shall be *mine*, or I will die in the arduous attempt;---and arduous it will be. True it is, that no woman *can* resist me. (I have, no vanity.) But I must go *artfully* to work with this girl, or I shall be blown up at once. She is devilish sensible, has a penetration beyond her years, a most improved understanding, and much of that judgement which is acquired from early reading. O Jack! how delightful will be the progress of *such* a seduction!--I shall find *amusements* at Ash Park,--never fear. Here are a hundred sweet retreats, in this delightful abode, where she spends many a

78 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

solitary hour alone. Here is an hermitage, in the most *unfrequent* spot; an old rustic building too, which she calls her ivy bower; --- both admirably *fitted* for the tender tale I shall breathe in her ear. At present I assume the most *indifferent* air; the most *vacant* look imaginable. --- I never saw, till now, the woman on whose heart I did not imagine but I had made some kind of impression; but this girl has a coldness in her manner, which sometimes piques my pride---an utter insensibility. I yesterday, as if by accident, touched her hand; I might perhaps (it was impossible to do otherwise) gently press it---but---alas! she looked with her usual enchanting innocence---not

the

the least flutter:--her charming eyes betrayed not the smallest emotion:--she talked the whole time of indifferent matters:--she has never yet, I am convinced, had the *tender passion* awakened;--*that* glorious work is left to thy happy friend!

• • • • •
 You would have laughed to have seen our parade to church, though not a public one. The divine Lucy did not attend the ceremony. A violent head-ach prevented her going: but is it not more likely to imagine she could not bear to see so *fine* a young fellow's

80 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

hand given away to another?---let me indulge that thought. *

I had previously instructed the *fetitious* Colonel Campley to pull his hat off on entering the church (the inside of one he has not seen these twenty years) but to my confusion he totally omitted that piece of ceremony. He had entirely forgot it, and I coughed and hemmed to no purpose. The widow affected to be mincing; whilst I looked round me with an easy assu-

* Such superlative vanity is the constant attendant of the vile wretches of the above cast :---they forming their opinion of the *whole* sex from the easy conquest of those unhappy deluded creatures they make their daily prey.

rance,

rance, and had taken care over night
 to ~~con~~ my lesson: a sentence or two
 of which, (hardened dog as I am),
 however made me shudder. I received
 my old woman's hand from my friend
 Campley. She was drest in *virgin white*.
 ---how ridiculous!--- Thy friend, ---
 but an account of *my* dress, *beggars* all
 description. A white cloth with the
 most elegant silver *point despagne*; --- a
 white fatten waistcoat, of tambour work,
 most peculiarly beautiful;---hair dres-
 sed inchantingly;---in short, figure to
 thyself a perfect Adonis, and then thou
 wilt have some faint idea of the bride-
 groom. I called forth every grace to
 my assistance, that comeliness, health,
 and vigour could give to a young fel-

82 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

low of my form and figure;---but, ah, Jack! it was for my adorable Lucy, that all those pains in dress were taken! ---it was for *her* alone, that all those graces were called forth.

On our return from church that lovely girl, though indisposed (from meer chagrin and envy to her old mother I doubt not) met us with an angel's sweetness: ---she wished us *joy*. I availed myself, you will easily imagine, of the old custom, which time, immemorial, prescribes of a *salutation* on these occasions. I affected a kind of formal indifference --- but, oh, M'Daniel! for such another transporting touch of her lips, I would sacrifice worlds,---nay
even

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 83

even marry fifty old women.---The dinner was splendid: but Luey, the divine Luey, had a languor in her charming eyes, for which I could easily account.---Vanity, thou knowest, is part of the rake's creed.

I was plagiouly disconcerted at dinner, as the old queer put of a country parson, who tacked me to my rib, asked me in what part of Northumberland my seat was situated, and how far from Newcastle? Miss Sidney too, (but with the most unsuspecting innocence) begged to know, if the park was well wooded, and if I had an her-

84 THE WEDDING RING, OR,

mitage: adding (poor innocent!) when we go to your seat, Sir Harry, I must insist on visiting a friend of mine lately married at Berwick upon Tweed. ---I bowed, and am not certain if, for once in my life, I did not blush! but I got through this cursed scrape unperceived, and with my usual good assurance; which, however, I thought would have failed me, the day of my arrival, on the first appearance of this divine girl.---We met in the garden; and, though I had a full view of her fine form the length of the terrace, yet, on her nearer approach, (though I pretended to be deeply engaged with my old woman) I could hardly
help

help starting. The amazing beauty of her whole form, her inimitable address, her elegant dishabille, a thousand graces in her harmonious voice, had so wonderful an effect, that, I say, on her being presented to me as Miss Sidney, *I, even I*, was ready to sink. Ah! it is Miss Sidney *indeed*, thought I: I remember too well that lovely form, but little did I then think (when I first saw her at Bath) how soon I should have her in my power. But to more serious business. My plots have all succeeded amazingly: I give myself all the airs of a young man of fortune and fashion. The estate for which I married this old harridan, lays most conveniently

niently round the park: the house is an admirable old mansion, and shall go with the adjoining land, for a sum which will more than even satisfy my importunate creditors: but, for many reasons, I shall protract the sale as long as I can:—the dogs know I am married to a rich widow, and *that* is enough. I shall expect thee here soon; perhaps a little of thy assistance may be necessary about the affair of this charming girl. Did you not enjoy the paragraph in the papers, of Sir Harry Beaumont being married to a young widow of large fortune? Adieu. *This week we*

receive

HISTORY OF Miss SIDNEY. 87

receive company; be careful what you
say; and believe me

Your's, sincerely,

P. O'NEALE.

P. S. Above twenty thousand pounds-
worth of timber, fit to cut, you rogue!

* This letter appears not.

Miss

Miss SIDNEY, to Miss WOODLEY.

Asb Park.

I Should apologize to my Harriet, for more than a fortnight's silence, did I not know she has most tenderly and sensibly felt for the very disagreeable state of her poor Lucy, during all the parade and bustle this strange wedding has occasioned. I wrote you a few particulars of the marriage day*, but I could not be more minute without really exposing my poor imprudent mother. O, my Harriet! what have I not suffered,

at

* This letter appears not.

HISTORY of Miss SIDNEY. 89

at being present at the very ridiculous ceremony of sitting dress'd up for three days; whilst the woman, my poor fond father doated on with unequalled tenderness, has been exposing herself with her young, (and I must add handsome) bridegroom, to every family of fashion in the whole county!--they came in shoals---indeed, almost innumerable, Curiosity, you know, is a strong passion, and must be gratified; and to say the truth, I am much inclined to think it is to that motive we chiefly owe our seeing such heaps of people on this occasion. Some ready to burst, I plainly saw, with *laughter*, at my poor mother's *youthful* appearance; others, eagerly gazing with astonishment at the fine figure

figure of her young husband;— but every eye I thought was by turns fixed on your poor Lucy: some with *pity*, I doubt not. The three Miss *Lawsons*, who sat next me, in a whisper exclaimed —“O! Miss Sidney, we envy your mother’s conquest, he is the *sweetest* man! —Good God, how handsome!”

“Hush, said I, for heaven’s sake.” — I would not, Harriet, for the world, Sir Harry should have heard his praises, for I am much deceived if he is not the vainest of men. There was such a confident assurance in his behaviour, a vanity so insufferable whenever he addressed the ladies, that I was almost surfeited with it; to the gentlemen, I thought,

HISTORY of Miss SIDNEY. 91

thought, he said but little, and seemed rather shy;--I don't know how.--But more of him, before I finish my letter.

Lady Hervey was with us the last day. She gave me, with her usual sweetness, a look of such tender pity when she left the room, that in some measure it compensated for the uneasy sensations I had felt the whole afternoon;--Do not regret, my Harriet, that your uncle's illness prevents your aunt and you paying this visit of form; for, ah! my dear, you would, I am convinced, suffer too much for your Lucy.

I did not know, till this morning, when

when the spiteful Miss Crowfoot called on me, that I had the general pity of the neighbourhood.

"Indeed, my dear Miss Sidney," said the malicious *thing*, "your case is really deplorable.---This sweet park, this venerable mansion, which have for such a number of years belonged to your ancestors, will now, by this strange step of your mother in law, be all lost to you. Nay, in short, you will in a manner be dependant on the bounty of this Sir Harry; who, after the death of your mother, may, and will, I dare say, marry again, and have a houl full of children, and then, my dear, I really shudder for you."---She was

enu-

enumerating a hundred other evils, which, probably, will too surely befall your poor friend in regard to her future fortune, when I cut her short, by saying, I could not grieve for the loss of what was not my own, and that heaven would be my support, I doubted not.

But now, my dear, I have a word or two to say to you concerning this Sir Harry; it is relative to a small circumstance in his behaviour to me, for which I cannot account.

Not a day in this last week has passed, but he has, on some occasion or other, found an opportunity of taking

ing me rather familiarly by the hand, either under a pretence of leading me down the steps into the garden, or some such idle pretence.

The familiarity of a relation may, certainly, authorize an innocent freedom of this kind, and on that account I have never refused my hand; but yet, I think, there is something odd in this.

But am I not over delicate,---over prudish (I must call it) in construing *that* into a *freedom*, which perhaps is no more than the mere fashion of the age we live in?

Sir Harry behaves with the utmost de-

decorum, I must say; nay with even a formal kind of gravity that is seldom seen in so young a man, bating this affair of his so frequently taking my hand, and that I cannot help thinking a little strange.

But, good heavens! he *can* mean nothing. Do, my dear, tell me what you really think of this. The extreme delicacy of your own mind will suggest to you, perfectly, what I mean,

I have so long been accustomed to lodge in my Harriet's faithful bosom every thought, doubt, or fear, which arises in my mind, that I should think

it

296 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

it the highest breach of friendship to conceal the above (though I hope trifling) incident.

Write, and believe me most

faithfully, your's,

LUCY SIDNEY.

P. S. I wrote the inclosed yesterday, and sealed it, but have this instant broke it open again to communicate to my Harriet a small circumstance which I think odd. About an hour ago, I was sitting in my chamber, in a very pensive mood, and vainly wishing for the dear society of the friend of my soul, whilst the tear of fond

re-

remembrance was stealing down my cheek, when I heard somebody tap gently at my closet door.

I knew it could not be my mother, as she and Sir Harry were gone out on an airing. I imagined, therefore, it was Martha, who might want to speak with me, I therefore said, "come in." But, bless me, my dear, how was I surprised to see Sir Harry enter! "Good heavens, said I, starting, I thought, Sir, you had been gone with my mother!"

---He came up to the table where I had been writing, I thought with a pretty deal of assurance, but assuming a careless air,---"I had some thoughts of going with her, but I altered my mind; for

she talked of calling on Mrs. Powis, and I think two old women at once, are too much at a time for any one man living. (I gave him here a penetrating look, which I thought a little disconcerted him.)---“ But come, Miss Sidney, my business is to ask a favour of you. Let me intreat you to go down and take a walk with me in the garden; or, if you had rather, let us have a little music. That divine song, you sung last night, has haunted me ever since. You are eternally moping by yourself in this melancholy closet, and take no kind of recreation.”

I looked grave, said I had letters to write, and could not possibly go down.

“ Indeed

HISTORY OF Miss SIDNEY. 99

“ Indeed you shall---(taking both my hands, which he had even the assurance to press between his) you *shall* go. What! have you been in tears?” (gazing eagerly in my face.) Are you not astonished, Harriet, at all this?

With an air of the utmost indifference, and *seeming* composure, (for indeed he had really fluttered me) I disengaged my hands; after which he had the assurance to open my bookcase, where he turned over some of my books; and though he really talked of nothing but the most indifferent matters, yet I own I thought his staying with me a full half hour an odd circumstance,----and yet,----as he is

100 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

the man who has married my mother, he certainly has a right to go into any part of this house.---But on his leaving me, I own I was greatly surprized: for, on my persisting that I should remain where I was till dinner, he reddened, and withdrew to the door;---then suddenly he came back a few steps, and violently grasping my hand, he put it to his lips, and muttering softly---“ thou heavenly angel !”---abruptly left the room.---Bless me, my dear, what could he mean by his rude grasp? I have even the savage marks of it still remaining.---And what could he mean by those strange words he uttered?---If he meant any thing, good God! I ought to fly for ever from Ash-

Park;

Park;----but if his action, and those words were only of common course, I am a most ridiculous girl to take notice of them.----You must allow with me (even *prudish* as you sometimes call me) that his coming up, just when my mother was out of the way, was somewhat *strange*----and yet it might be merely accidental. In short, I am lost in a labyrinth of thought. I wish I could be absent for one fortnight. Your aunt has often, you know, insisted on my returning your last kind visit:--- may I beg to know if it would be inconvenient, just at this time, for me to spend a week or two at Woodley House? I have ten thousand things to say to my Harriet.----Write, I charge you,

to-morrow, and tell me if it is possible for me to be so happy as to come to you?----Surely, your aunt (unkind as she in general is to my poor Harriet, to her shame be it spoken) will grant us this happiness. Tell your uncle I have twenty new songs, which I will sing as a *charm* to drive his gout away.



Miss

Miss WOODLEY to Miss SIDNEY.

Woodley-House.

WITH infinite regret I tell my beloved friend, that I must at present be deprived of the happiness of seeing her here; for, most unfortunately, the small-pox, two days ago, broke out in our family. Two of the servants are seized with the most fatal symptoms of it; and my aunt, who has, you know, never had this dreadful distemper, we fear is beginning to sicken.

She (to give her her due in this respect) is sorry this accident renders it

F 4

impos-

104 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
impossible we should have now the happiness of seeing you. O! my Lucy, judge from the feelings of your own dear heart, what mine must feel from disappointment on this unlucky accident! Indeed, I could find in my heart to fret myself almost sick with vexation, did I not know that murmuring and repining will not avail, and that my duty requires I must do my utmost to support my spirits in this scene of sickness.

But as our meeting at present is impossible; continue, my Lucy, to write continually, and pray be as circumstantial as you can. But now, my dear, to the *interesting* subject of this Sir Harry.

Harry.----Silence those delicate fears and scruples of yours, for he certainly *can mean nothing* *.

You ask if I am not astonished at his behaviour in the closet?---Why, no, my dear, I cannot say I am.---I really think he meant no more than innocently to pass away an hour with you in the manner he proposed :---and, upon my word, the ridiculous levity of this age we live in is such, that I never look upon any of those complimentary speeches, from a vain young man (as such this Sir Harry is) but with the most

* The unsuspecting innocence of a young mind, always apt to judge the *best*, is too often deceived.

perfect indifference.----And as to his taking your hand (though to a delicacy so extreme as that of my sweet friend, it appeared odd) yet the general freedom of the world, as I above remarked, makes these liberties (if you *will* call them so) meer things of course. Indeed, my Lucy, did I entertain the least shadow of a doubt of what you hint at, in the behaviour of this man, I should shudder.---Good heaven, forbid!---But I cannot, will not permit my mind to dwell for one moment on the shocking theme. He cannot be so very *base*.---Besides, I think, if he was so superlatively wicked, he could not conceal his sentiments from a penetration like yours.---I should say more on
this

this subject, did I not well know that such is your ——— What shall I call it? ——— innate modesty---such is your timid fears in whatever concerns your delicacy, that every, even the least compliment, alarms that exquisite sensibility of yours. To a reserve like my Lucy's, possibly the freedom of this Sir Harry may appear *strange*,---but depend on it, my dear, he *means nothing*---if he does ---heavens!----However, you will observe his every *look*,----from which I should think more might be gathered than from any thing else.---I die to see him: I would soon see the *bottom* of his *vain heart*,---never fear.

108 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

I am this instant called away to my aunt, therefore adieu.----I charge you to write as *frequently*, and as *minutely* as possible, to your faithful,

(but from not seeing you, most miserably disappointed)

HARRIET.



Miss

*Miss SIDNEY to Miss WOODLEY.**Asb-Park.*

I AM vexed to my heart, my kind friend, at the unlucky accident which prevents my coming to Woodley-House, and more cause have I every day for vexation; for indeed I can by no means approve of many things I see in the behaviour of this gay Sir Harry. Never tell me, my sweet *unsuspecting* friend, that he can *mean nothing*, after such a conversation as I have to relate, which happened this morning.---O! my dear, indeed he is ---he must be a bad, not to say a very
vile

110 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
vile wretch.----His sentiments so light
on the most solemn ties, his opinions
so full of sensual pleasure, must pro-
ceed from a very debauched mind,
which has, I fear, been too much *back-*
neyed in every vice. O, my poor de-
ceived mother!----And must I remain
under the same roof with such a man?

-----“ Better it were,
“ I met the ravening lion when he roar’d
“ With sharp constraint of hunger. Better
“ ’twere,
“ That all the miseries which nature owes,
“ Were mine at once.”

But to proceed with the strange ac-
count I have to give you.

As

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 111

As I knew my mother, and this bad young man, were both out this morning;---at least I am confident I saw him on horseback;---I took a solitary walk towards my favourite spot, the Hermitage; but being rather fatigued with my walk, I sat down on the root of an old oak, by the side of the path which leads through the copse. A few of the little fawns in the park had trotted after me, and were now surrounding me, and I had just began feeding them with some bread I had in my pocket for that purpose, and flung a book down by me in which I was going to read,---when, good God!---Harriet! to my utter astonishment, who should I see come down the path but Sir Harry!

Harry! never tell me *this could be by accident*; he *must* have watched me to that very spot.---My astonishment at sight of him, the number of ideas which at once rushed into my apprehensive mind, joined with a fear of I knew not what, altogether so seized my spirits, that it was with the utmost difficulty I preserved myself from fainting. He approached the tree, on the spreading roots of which I was sitting, with much confidence.

“ Bless me! I little thought of seeing you, Sir Harry!”

“ I am going to speak to some workmen; but little did I imagine I should have

have this *unlooked* for joy, of meeting the finest girl the world affords in this retreat."---Then with a bombast compliment of my drawing the very beasts (meaning the deer) about me---"See, Miss Sidney, the very fawns stand in silent admiration of you!----What a subject is here for the finest picture in the universe---the most lovely of women, in the sweetest retreat in the world!"---O, my dear, I would have given the Indies to have that moment been ten thousand miles from him.---Then, with the most easy insinuating manner (alas! he must have been accustomed much to talk to our credulous sex) he flung himself down on the grass, by the side of the tree, in a leaning

114 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
ing easy posture, and taking up the
book I had by me, which happened un-
fortunately to be Smith's Phædra and
Hyppolitus, he asked me my opinion
of that play.

“ I think it, Sir, one of the finest
“ tragedies in the English language.---
“ Indeed a consummate one.”

“ Why, yes---I admire it too exceed-
ingly.----But there is something, after
all, inconsistent in Phædra's running
mad for Hyppolitus--I mean her look-
ing on her passion in the light of *incest*;
and all that stuff and nonsense about
her guilt.”

“ Sir!

“ Sir !---(said I extremely astonished)
“ Phædra’s *guilt*, stuff and nonsense,
“ did you say ?”

“ Why, my divine girl (snatching
“ my hand) what *relation* was Phædra
“ to Hyppolitus ? None in the world.”

“ Relation, Sir Harry !--- You amaze
“ me !-----did she not marry his fa-
“ ther ?”

“ Ha !----ha !----ha !----Marry his fa-
ther, indeed !---Why, I hope, my
charming Lucy, you do not imagine
that *I* am any relation to *you*, because
an old toothless parson muttered a few
unintelligible sentences over Mrs. Sid-
ney

ney and myself? sentences, which, I am convinced, not one in a thousand ever think of after their escape out of the church."

I withdrew my hand, and with great seriousness, replied,----"I shall always look on *that* man as my *father*, who *married* my *mother*."

"Married again!-----that word is strangely misunderstood.----Yes, thou angelic girl, believe me, it is the *union* of *souls* alone which makes the *marriage* *rite*;---there can be none other.

"O happy state, where souls each other draw,

"Where love is liberty, and nature, law;

"Where

HISTORY OF Miss SIDNEY. 117

“ Where thought meets thought, ere from the
“ lips they part,
“ And each warm wish springs instant from
“ the heart.”

But that lovely bosom is yet a stranger to this enchanting passion.---Oh ! (gazing on me in a manner which shocked my soul) what happiness will that man experience who has the glorious task of teaching the sweet lesson to such a charming girl !”

“ I will hear no more, Sir Harry, of this stuff.” Attempting to rise.

“ By heavens, Madam, you shall, shall hear what my soul ——”

“ What

“What mean you, Sir? (said I, violently struggling to force my hand, which he held to his lips) let me go this instant, or you will repent this rudeness.”

O, Harriet, his *looks* too plainly convinced me of his guilty sentiments. I thought I should have fainted.---The solitary spot,---a thousand dreadful ideas rushed into my mind;---when, to my unspeakable joy, I heard the tread of some person in the winding path on my right hand; and looking round, saw the poor beggar-woman who, once before, I had met on this very spot, there being a foot-path, though not much frequented, to the next village,
whither

whither she was going.--O gracious heaven! thought I, whose blessed Providence hast sent this poor wretch to my relief!--an angel in its most glittering form could not have been more welcome.

The vile man---for such I am now convinced he is---started at the sight of the poor wretch: he looked as if he could have that instant murdered her.

“Where, said I, good woman, are you going?”

“To the great house, Madam, for a few scraps for my poor children.”

“I am

"I am going that way too," said I, rising to go, and giving the vile Sir Harry a look of much contempt, mixt with indignation. I instantly left the place, beginning a conversation with the woman and children, whom I kept up with the whole way, secretly blessing, as I went, the kind hand of Providence which had sent this beggar to my aid, to the very spot on which I had before relieved her.---On arriving at the house, I ordered her to be supplied plentifully, and retiring to my apartment, flung myself on my bed, in an agony of grief and despair.

O, my Harriet, what, what am I to think of all this?---Is it possible I can
support

support the thought of living in the same house with such a wretch?---O! no, no.---His meeting me, which must be premeditated,----his looks,----his shocking sentiments,----all conspire to fill me with the most dreadful apprehensions. Tell me,---tell me, my friend, what you would have me do.---O, my poor deceived mother!---Victim of folly and imprudence! Good heavens! my dear, what might have been the consequence, had not heaven in its gracious Providence interposed! You see his opinions are the most profligate! What might I not have suffered in so solitary a retreat from a man of so vile a cast!

I could not go down to dinner!—I sent my mother word I had a violent head-ach.—Indeed I shall hardly have common patience to sit in company with such a wretch for the future. Good heavens, send your aunt well as soon as possible, that I may have some excuse for leaving, for a few weeks at least, this house!—Or shall I fly privately to some place of refuge?—Depend on it, he will persevere in his shocking sentiments:— for he will certainly flatter himself, that I shall not expose his behaviour to my mother, as, indeed, I shall not. No: rather than embitter the remainder of her wretched days, I would for ever abandon sweet Ash-Park.

“ Tho’

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 123

"Tho' airs of paradise did fan the house,

"And angels offic'd all;"

I would sooner

"Wander through the world,

"And live on fordid scraps at great men's

"doors."

Adieu.---In the utmost perplexity and
distraction of mind, I subscribe myself
ever,

Your faithful

Lucy.

G 2

Miss

Miss WOODLEY to Miss SIDNEY.

Woodley-House.

THOUGH so late in the evening,
 I cannot support the thought of
 one moment delaying to inform you
 of some shocking intelligence I have just
 received.---O my sweet friend, this vile
 wretch Sir Harry is the most profligate
 of men!---Indeed it is true. Mr. Wil-
 son, who dined this day with my uncle,
 told us, he is as great a villain as ever
 existed:---with regard to our sex, infa-
 mous to the last degree: and his chief
 glory consists in boasting how many poor
 wretches he has seduced. O, my Har-
 riet,

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 125

riety, I tremble for you! Heaven shield you from his vile arts. I fear---I greatly fear---you are not safe whilst you remain under that roof. I have ten thousand things to impart to you concerning this detestable man.---Alas! my dear, he is a vile cheat.---Fly---but where, alas! can you be safe from the reach of his horrid designs?---You see I have only a pencil to write this alarming billet, to warn you, to increase your vigilance. That every good angel may guard you,

Prays your

HARRIET.

Miss SIDNEY, to Miss WOODLEY.

Beechwood Farm.

O My Harriet, I am at length escaped, and with unfulfilled innocence, I thank heaven. But, ah! my friend, your kind billet, your prudent caution, arrived but just in time to save me from inevitable perdition: and had not that all-gracious Providence interposed, whose greatest care is innocence distressed, I must have been at this moment in a state of absolute distraction. I yet shudder at the apprehension that I am no more than ten miles

miles (at a small farm, or rather cottage, in my road to London) from the most vile and abandoned of men. I am, however, I bless heaven, with honest good people, who from my dress and appearance look upon me in no other light than that of a plain country girl, in search of a service.---But I must relate, in as much order as my distracted mind will give me leave, the dreadful cause of my abrupt departure from sweet Ash-Park. Oh! heavens, do I live to say I *have* left it?---But had I not, guilt, distraction must have been the certain consequence: and though poverty is now my portion, yet it is attended by virtue. Yes, I embrace the most obscure state

of humble life,---nay, even the miseries of absolute want, sooner than I ever will return to disclose to my wretched mother the shocking cause of my departure. Heaven will be my refuge in all future distress, I doubt not. To that heaven, and to its watchful angels, do I commit myself, whilst I relate my sad story.---But I must, for a few moments, lay down my pen, as my tears flow too fast, to give me leave to proceed.

I will now, my Harriet, endeavour to satisfy your anxious heart (which I know is suffering agonies for my distress)

trials) in as minute an account of myself as possible.

I retired to my apartment on Friday night about ten o'clock. I supped with my mother alone; the vile wretch, Sir Harry, who dined out, having sent word that he should not return till the morning, being much indisposed with a bad head-ach. To my apartment then I retired, which I should tell you I had changed above a week, on account of an alteration being made in the chimney, for one in the old wing of the house, which looks into the park, and is in a manner detached from every other room, except the library to which it leads,---O Harriet!

do you not shudder for me?--In this solitary room I was sitting, and had dismissed Martha for the night, when, finding myself not disposed to sleep, though almost entirely undressed, I took up a book for half an hour; then again, read over and *pondered* on the kind, but shocking contents of your alarming billet, which I had received in the afternoon. I then put my candle, still burning, in the chimney, and sat myself down on the side of the bed, preparing to still further undress; when I thought I heard the window, in the closet adjoining to my chamber, softly drawn up.--I trembled:---but hearing nothing for a few minutes (it was then deep midnight) I thought it

was

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 131

was only the meer effects of fancy.----
But, gracious heaven! what was my
terror, what language can be found to
describe the horror which seized me,
when I saw the vilest of wretches open
the closet door directly opposite to
where I was sitting, and coming to-
wards me!--I screamed with a cry of
fright and astonishment, which no pen
can describe. Heaven, in its mercy,
sustained me from absolute fainting.---
I was even breathless, and gasping
with amazement, when the horrid man
had the unparalleled assurance to throw
himself on his knees just before me.

“Hear me, my charming girl:---
“why this unnecessary fear?---Hear

132 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

“ the most ardent professions of a passion, which——”

“ Vile, abominable wretch (said I, violently screaming) begone this instant, or I will raise the house with my cries.”

“ You may spare yourself that trouble, returned the monster ;---the whole family are buried in sleep.----O my lovely angel, hear what I have to say. ----I adore you---never, never, will I cease, till those dear lips, that enchanting tongue, pronounce my pardon.---O that you would permit me to give you a taste of what I feel !”

“ Begone

"Begone--begone vile monster!--
O heavens look down (said I, tears
streaming from my eyes) protect me
this---this once, from such vile out-
rage, and I will bless thy goodness."

"Outrage!----my angel!----by all
the joys I am determined this night
to experience, I will not leave this
spot till I have gained my purpose---
Say, my sweet girl, that you will hear
me---will at least pity a passion which
preys on my very vitals."

"Thou impious--abandoned--how
darest thou have the presumption to ap-
proach me?"

"Pre-

---“Presumption! By all that’s sacred I swear, I must, I will persist in adoring you.---The world can never know our tender union---and thus, (seizing my hand with the most outrageous grasp) thus I make you mine.”

I rose, half frantic, and attempted to get round the bed to pull the bell, which unluckily was on the other side ---when he caught me in his arms.--- O Harriet! do I live to relate this?--- I disengaged myself with amazing force from his horrid grasp---when he, determined, I found, to make use of even violence to compleat his execrable purpose, raised his voice, and with a kind of stifled rage exclaimed; “And can you

you imagine, Madam, that I will lose this opportunity so dearly purchased? no---by heavens I will not."

Here he again caught me to his breast---and, ah, my Harriet!---I must, at that fatal moment have been---heavens! I shudder at the horrid thought---have been inevitably ruined---had not that gracious power, who heard my redoubled shrieks, alarmed the shocking wretch by a sudden noise at my chamber door that dreadful instant:---it appeared like the tread of some person in the passage leading to my door, and though I now believe it to have been occasioned by no other than a little favourite spaniel of mine, who
always

136 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
always slept there, and alarmed with
my shrieks, would probably have raised
the house; yet it was the means of
my safety;----it was the means of my
preservation from the vilest of all
wretches.

“ There, thou impious villain, some
“ one is now come to my assistance.”

He, though practised in these shock-
ing scenes, was so alarmed, that he in-
stantly quitted his grasp, and slunk
with haste back the same way he came;
swearing, as he went, that the next at-
tempt should not be a vain one. He
then opened the closet door, and es-
caped from the same window where he
had entered.

I sat

I sat a minute petrified with wonder :
 ---then, suddenly starting up, I flung
 myself on my knees in a rapturous
 exclamation of praise, to the Almighty
 Power, who had so wonderfully pre-
 served me :---never was a heart over-
 flowing with more gratitude :---never
 were more sincere adorations offered to
 the God of Mercy,---Then with a fran-
 tic eye I surveyed the room, and sud-
 denly rising, I flew to the closet which
 I double-locked ; and once more, prof-
 trate on my knees, I implored the di-
 vine assistance.

"O my God (I cried) direct me for
 "the best,---relieve me from my dif-
 "ficulties, which without thy assistance
 "must be unsurmountable."

Here

Here I was seized with a sudden impulse, an inspired kind of resolution, instantly to leave the house. The last words of the abandoned wretch, still sounding in my ears, gave me every reason to imagine that he would never leave his horrid pursuit till, either by force, or some hellish stratagem, he had accomplished his shocking designs. Once more I hastily surveyed my apartment ---then, being seized with a sudden fit of desperation, or rather, let me call it, by a degree of inspiration from some heavenly power, who then permitted my guardian angel powerfully to strengthen and support me, with hasty steps I began tying up, in a small bundle,

the

Here

the little linnen I had in that apartment. I looked at the small stock of cash I had in my pocket: for unluckily the chief part of my money, some bank bills and my jewels, were all, except a little diamond ring on my finger, in my old apartment, at the other end of the house, as were likewise all my wearing apparel, except, as I have mentioned, just a few necessaries I had worn from day to day. I had, however, my watch, and a ten pound note in my pocket book, besides a few guineas in my purse, so that I was in no immediate danger of absolute want. O, my sweet Harriet! how does your gentle heart tremble for your poor Lucy! but it was the only method heaven pointed out for my safety.

I felt

I felt a degree of resolution which I cannot describe: my soul seemed animated with a superior degree of strength. I recollected, before I quitted my room, I might, possibly, in the kitchen, through which I intended to pass, meet with an old cloak and hat belonging to one of the maid servants. I tied a coloured pocket-handkerchief over my head, and once more ardently recommending myself to the Almighty father of the universe, I softly unbolted my door, and with the utmost intrepidity, and with soft steps, though with the quickest lightening's speed, I hastened down the great-stair-case. As I descended, the clock struck two---a most profound silence reigned throughout the house---not
even

even a mouse, or cricket was stirring. In passing through the great hall, the moon which was shining with its brightest lustre, darted its beams full on my dear father's picture; and so resplendently clear was that glorious luminary, which was then "walking in all its brightness," that I had the most perfect view of the exact resemblance of my much loved parent. I was affected:—I stopped for one moment:—a tear stole down my cheek:—I gazed for the last time, probably, I shall ever more see that dear resemblance of the best of men, and of fathers. O, sacred shade! (I softly cry'd) look down, and join with thy fellow spirits of just men made perfect, in the glorious task
of

142 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

of guarding distressed innocence. Then eagerly snatching a last look at his dear image, with hasty steps I flew through those rooms which lead to the kitchen. Here, to my joy, I found what would sufficiently disguise me; an old black hat, a scarlet cloak of one of the maids, and, what was still a greater treasure, an old brown stuff gown. This I put on, and pinning up my gown, like a country maid, I equipped myself in the black hat and cloak ---and still retaining my resolution, unlocked the house door, and sallied forth.

O, my friend! it is impossible to say, what a human mind is not capable of performing, when it resolutely places

its

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 143

its chief dependance on the Almighty Providence.

I ran, or rather flew through the great avenue, which leads to the park-gates. Here I scrambled over some pales as well as I could, and miserably scratching my poor arms with the briars on which I fell on the other side, I got up, and with my utmost speed pursued my flight through those fields which lead down to the high road; where, I doubted not, I should soon meet with a carriage of some kind which would convey me to some safe distance. Here I stopped to take breath: and the moon still shining in all its splendor, I saw by its friendly beams the beloved spot

in

in which Woodley-House is situated.

The distance then so small, I plainly saw the grove adjoining the garden,

directly under my Harriet's apartment.

Ah! my sweet friend (I softly exclaimed) may you be enjoying that repose to

which your poor wandering Lucy is a stranger. The well-known little path,

through which, in happier days, I had so often trod with delight, to meet my

dearest Harriet, was now the scene of very different emotions. For the last

time, I contemplated, with a kind of melancholy pleasure, the habitation

which contained my beloved friend. The grove, --- the well-known mead, ---

awakened a thousand tender feelings: had I had time to meditate, these lines

of

of my favourite poet, Gray, must have occurred to my remembrance.

" Ah groves---ah fields---belov'd in vain,

" Where once my careless childhood stray'd

" Insensible of pain ;

" I feel the gales that from ye blow,

" A momentary bliss bestow."

Now, for the last time, I sighing, turned my eyes from scenes which will be ever dear to your Lucy.—I again, with my utmost speed, pursued the path which leads to the high road:—but in passing by the old oak, under whose spreading shade we have so often sat at the bottom of the avenue leading to your house, I felt a tear stealing down my cheek. This sensation of tender-

ness was, however, obliged to surrender itself to the utmost fear and astonishment imaginable which seized me; as I thought, on the other side the hedge, I plainly could distinguish the voices of men.—A panic, next to fainting, struck to my heart. However, by the help of a hawthorn then in full bloom, I was perfectly secreted from any human view. Here, for a full hour, I remained in a state of the most miserable suspense; but to my joy at last I found the objects of my fear were no other than two poor peasants preparing for their daily labour.—I waited with the most trembling impatience whilst they settled their simple, (but to them) grand preliminary, which way they should drive

drive their flock for that day. Whilst they were debating this important point, I was entertained with the most glorious sight in nature :—the rising sun,

“ The powerful king of day,

“ Rejoicing in the east, the lessening cloud,

“ The kindling azure, and the mountain’s brow

“ Illum’d with fluid gold, his near approach

“ Betoken’d glad.”——

———“ Music awak’d

“ The native voice of undissembled joy ;

“ And thick around the woodland hymns arose

“ Up sprung the lark——

“ Shrill-voic’d, and loud, the messenger of
morn ;

“ Ere yet the shadows flew, he mounted sung,

“ Amid the dawning clouds—and from their
haunts

“ Call’d up the tuneful nations. Every copse

“ Deep-tangled, tree irregular and bush

148 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

“ Bending with dewy moisture, o’er the heads
“ Of the gay quirksters, that lodg’d within,
“ Were prodigal of harmony.”

THOMSON.

But my present sensations were too full of apprehension to admit of my paying that proper regard and adoration, to the *smiling God*, as Thomson elegantly styles the glorious Being, who so lavishly in this sweet month of May, renders the whole country a blooming garden:---yet, I secretly exclaimed,

“ These are thy works, *parent of good*,

“ *Thyself*, how wond’rous then !”——

By

By this time I was got to the stile which joins the great high road. Here I stopped to take breath: and here I knew I should not be long without seeing a carriage of some kind pass. As to any apprehensions of my being discovered, I had none, my dress being so well calculated for disguise. Indeed, my Harriet, I defy even *you*, had you met me in one of your early morning rambles (and oh, what would I have given for *such* an interview) to have known me for any other than a downright country maid.

I had not waited here above three minutes, in which time I stole a peep at my watch, and saw it was just six

H 3

o'clock,

o'clock, when a small kind of higgler's cart passed by. I got over the stile, and saw the man who drove it appeared to be a decent, honest-looking fellow.

"Pray, master, said I, can you give a young woman a lift to the next town? I have only this small bundle with me."

"Yes, with all my heart," he said, "you may ride and welcome. "Come pretty maid (so thinks I, flattery is inseparable to the *whole sex*) let me lift you up in the cart." This he did with great civility, and seated me very commodiously between two large butter-baskets,

baskets, which, he informed me, he was going to carry to a little house, called Beech-wood Farm, where he was to take in some chickens and eggs to carry to market. On his telling me this farm was situated just by the high road, I determined to stay a day or two there till I could get a conveyance in one of the stage coaches, at once to carry me to London, which I thought would be safer than travelling a whole day in this open cart. As you know I admire *nature*, in her plainest dress, I should (had not my mind been nearly in a state of distraction) have been much delighted with my companion, who was *simplicity* itself.

Observing I sighed (I have always, my dear, observed, if a young woman sighs, it is conjectured *love* must be in the case.) "Come, come, (said he) never mind it.---If so be it is your *fate* to have the young man you sigh for---why---all the world cannot hinder you.---Mayhap he loves another---*never* mind it.----In my young days I was crossed in love myself. I pined---could not eat---nor sleep---and all for what? ---why, for a---plague on her---a cross-grained hussy.---Ah Jenny Rose, you have much to answer for?----I had bought the ring and licence.---Well! ---that don't signify---every one, as the saying is, for themselves, and God for us all."

He

He then fell into a fit of musing, which I interrupted by asking, if Jenny Rose was already married.

“ Aye, my good girl, some twenty years ago.---But let that pass.---I am married now myself to a very good body.”

“ Have you a little family ?”

“ O yes, mistress, I have five small children” (how my heart yearned, Harriet to give the poor man a guinea ; but the fear of my being suspected to be above my appearance, prevented me.) He continued “ Yes, I have five of them, poor little things. When I

have done work of an evening, they always run out to meet their daddy.---My chief pleasure in this world is to play with them, and to scramble on to get us a bit of food for our Sunday's dinner.---But I am a contented man, for all what I said (continued he, with a half smile) about Jenny Rose---I owe no man living one penny: I work hard to maintain my wife and little ones: ---and I serve my God to the best of my poor knowledge."

I was affected with his honest simplicity—and the character of the honest shepherd in Shakespeare's, As you like it, instantly occurred to my memory, where he tells Touchstone,

" —I

“ — I am a true labourer; I earn
 “ that I eat, get that I wear; owe no
 “ man hate, envy no man’s happiness;
 “ glad of other mens good, content
 “ with my harm; and the greatest of
 “ my pride is, to see my ewes graze,
 “ and my lambs suck.”

The poor man before me exactly answered this simple virtuous character. — Ah! good soul! (thought I) you fully perform every duty of your present state of being, and are daily practising the best philosophy without knowing it:—“ And pray what is your name?” said I, determining, at some happy future period of my life, if it ever laid

in my power, to assist so much industry.

“ My name, mistress?—Why, every body at Ashford knows poor Ned Grove.—I lives at the little white house just by the Five Oaks, at the bottom of the hill.”—He then told me his little boy Jemmy could say all his catechism, and the hundredth psalm, without book.

But I was now to part from my poor honest friend, as he told me the house before us was Beech-wood Farm. I found this farm to be no more (though dignified by that name) than a meer cottage; but the situation, beyond all description, beautiful.—A large wood
of

of beech, almost joining to the little garden, even crouded with roses and honey-suckles, added much to the beauty of this really sweet spot.—I never was more struck with the appearance of industry and rural simplicity. The cleanly milk-pail hung on the stile, which leads to the adjoining meadow; —the *hum* of bees, whose hives were ranged on one side the little green plat before the door; the well, round whose side an immense number of chickens and young ducks were feeding; in the yard, the good old house-dog, outstretched and sleeping:—on a bank of green chamomile, under a large gooseberry tree, sat three lovely children, glowing with health, eating their whole-

some

some breakfast of brown bread and milk:—this was a simple scene, but altogether inexpressibly amusing, to a mind so fond of rural nature, in its most artless dress, as is that of your Lucy's.—But I was delighted too with the good old woman herself, who now came out to the little wicket gate with her knitting in her hand. After she and my poor conductor had most cordially greeted each other, and asked a hundred questions of each other's family, I alighted, and asked the good woman (whose very neat appearance in her clean checked apron and handkerchief, whiter than the driven snow, had not a little prejudiced me in her favour) if I could have a lodging there for a few days :

days:—"Aye, with all my heart, and welcome;—and for as long as you please:—I have a spare room.—We have only a plough-boy, and the girl that milks the cows, besides my gaffer, and these poor little things here (pointing to the children, who I found afterwards were her grand-children) aye—aye—you may stay as long as you please;—what, you are going to service I suppose."——I told her yes, when I could get one.

My honest guide was now preparing to depart, having got his cart filled. I took him heartily by the hand (looking on him as the humble instrument of my escape, under the hand of Providence)

vidence) and offered him a shilling to drink.

"No, no, (with a look of honest surprize) dost think I would take any thing?—not I—not one penny. I wish I could have carried thee further, my pretty lass.—No, no, keep thy money."
—I rung his hand, rough with laborious industry.

Hide your heads (thought I) ye fordid rich, whilst generosity, honesty, and humanity, fly from your guilty domes of splendid misery, to dwell with rural peace and poverty.

"Poor,

“ Poor, patient, quiet, honest peo-
 “ ple,—your poverty the treasury of
 “ your simple virtues, will not be en-
 “ vied by the world:—nature, thou
 “ art still friendly to the scantiness
 “ thou hast created;—with all thy great
 “ works about thee, little hast thou left
 “ to give to the industrious, and con-
 “ tented *.”

Indeed, my Harriet, I am convinced
 the virtues, like the sweetest flowers,
 often are the produce of the lowly vale,
 and die like “ roses which in deserts
 bloom;” and I am as well convinced,
 they are registered where they will ob-
 tain eternal, unfading rewards.

* Sterne's Sentimental Journey.

After

162 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

After my honest guide had heartily shook the hand of dame Rose, (who is the mother, I afterwards found, of his former sweetheart, Jenny Rose) he drove off, and the good woman then conducted me (the children *all* following) into her house to shew me a chamber, neat beyond description, which I hired for a week. Here, as you see me safe, under this secure, though *thatched* roof, I will lay down my tired pen till to-morrow, when I will again pursue an account of whatever has, or may occur to your ever

Faithful and affectionate,

LUCY.

Miss

Miss SIDNEY in Continuation.

Beech-wood Farm.

I Now, my beloved Harriet, again resume an employment ever delightful to me; but, alas! now the only method left of unburthening my oppressed heart of its every anxious thought, to the friend of my soul, whose tender solicitude at this critical juncture is, I know, all engaged for my safety.

The good woman attended me to my room, as I before acquainted you, the children almost quarrelling which should
carry

carry my bundle, but a little chubbed-faced boy, about four years old, seemed most zealous to perform that service. I desired to be left alone, saying, I required some sleep, for indeed I was greatly fatigued.

My obliging attendants being departed, I flung myself on my knees, and in a most fervent thanksgiving to the Almighty, adored his goodness for so happily conducting my steps to this safe retreat, where I could have time at least to recollect my scattered thoughts, and to fix on some future scheme for my support. I found my small apartment neat to the utmost degree. A few delfh dishes ranged on the humble chimney-

chimney-piece, the little window-curtain of sprigged linen, the shining brown floor, the neat patch-work quilt, the emblem of industry, all, together, presented me with a most exact pattern of rural œconomy. I observed on the bed a bundle, as I thought, of linen, but on a nearer view I was extremley astonished to find a very young infant in a most sweet and profound sleep. I gazed on it some minutes with equal surprize and delight; when it began to awake, and fixing its little eyes upon me, with the smiling innocence of that early age, I attempted to raise it up, but found my finger at that moment so strongly grasped by the little wretch, that an exquisite stroke in Mr. Fielding's

inimitable

166 THE WEDDING RING; or,
inimitable Tom Jones, instantly re-
curred to my mind; where Allworthy
says, "He still feels the little tender
" grasp of the infant's finger on his
" hand, and still sees its innocent im-
" ploring look, which melted his heart
" to pity and tenderness." I now felt
the whole beauty of that passage.

Believing it might want food, I
called for my kind hostess, who said, on
entering, "I beg your pardon, Mrs.
Betty, (I had told her my name was
Betty Grove) for leaving poor little
Billy asleep on your bed.—Wisht-heart!
—What art awake?—he is my youngest
of four grand-children: his poor mo-
ther

ther died in child-bed ; and I have took to the poor things."

Do not you, Harriet, love my good dame Rose ?

She then gave me a melancholy account of the death of her beloved daughter ; and, after feeding the child, was preparing to carry it away, when I begged it might remain with me.

How many thousand methods has Providence of alleviating, or at least diverting our distresses ! I could not help looking on my finding this little stranger

stranger so unexpectedly, as the particular designation of some heavenly power, for the present alleviation of my almost distracted mind. We slight and over-look these secret kindnesses of the Almighty power. These little incidents may be compared to flowers, which we sometimes find springing up in a thorny path, through a road of dangers and difficulties.

I pressed the sweet smiling innocent to my breast, and kissing it, begged it might remain entirely with me as long as I should stay, which was readily granted me: and indeed I had often, during my abode here, an opportunity of proving the truth of the above observation,

servation, in regard to the present little object of my amusement.



I have spent, in this peaceful abode, three days in greater tranquility than perhaps you can imagine it possible for me to do in such distressing circumstances: but, my dear, my escape from Ash-Park, is a source of the most solid satisfaction: the glorious motive for which I abandoned the pomp and splendor, and those elegances of life to which I have ever been accustomed, gives an alacrity to my mind which I am not able to describe: heavens! to stay to be daily solicited by the impious guilty

170 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
passion of a wretch who is married to
my ——. O! I shudder at the
thought!—and to reveal his horrid
crime to the miserable woman, now his
wife, in order to free myself of the
horrid outrage, would be for ever plant-
ing a dagger in the breast of that un-
happy woman. No—welcome pover-
ty: to the guilty alone thou art terri-
ble: but sweet are the slumbers of the
spotless mind, though bereft of the
thousand superfluities which attend pomp
and affluence. I have youth and health,
and doubt not soon to be able to pro-
cure me the means of a support. I
intend to go to London, as the best
biding-place, by the stage coach which
passes not a hundred yards from this
house.

house. I could indeed be content to spend the remainder of my days in this sweet retirement.

“ And pensive listen to the various voice

“ Of rural peace: the herds, the flocks, the
“ birds;

“ The hollow-whispering breeze, the plaint
“ of rills,

“ That purling down amid the twisted roots

“ Which creep around, their dewy moisture
“ shake

“ On the sooth'd ear. From these abstracted
“ oft,

“ I'd wander thro' the philosophic world,

“ Where in bright train, continual wonders
“ rise.”

But this sweet retreat (though the abode of peaceful innocence) is not,

172 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
my Harriet, by any means proper for
me to reside at much longer, as its be-
ing no farther distant than ten miles
from Ash-Park, fills me with a hundred
fears :—every horseman I see pass from
my little window, (though almost shaded
by honeysuckles) I imagine may be the
vilest of wretches in pursuit of me.—
Every time my chamber door is open-
ed, I am seized with a sudden tremor,
lest the next object which presents itself,
should be the detestable Sir Harry.



I was this evening much affected by
a conversation of my good dame Rose,
who I desired to bring up her spinning-
wheel,

wheel, whilst I made a cap for her little grand-daughter. After she had, with a face of the most anxious industry, filled her distaff, she began:—"And so, Mrs. Betty, we shall soon lose you? —Poor Billy and Peggy will cry their hearts out when you are gone, you be so good to them. I wish you would try for a place in these parts:—We have a deal of gentry about us. I will walk with you to-morrow to Sir Philip Manly's at Hall Place:—he has a good lady for his wife, as ever the sun shone on, and she I hear wants a housemaid. And then I understands at Woodley House there is a lady's maid wanted: that sweet young lady, Miss Woodley, (there's for you Harriet) has been en-

174 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
quiring all about for one.—I think you,
Mrs. Betty, would just do for her, and
so, last night, my gaffer said.”—I smiled,
and changed colour, with an emotion
of joy at hearing your dear name.—She
continued.

“ Lord, how time passes away!—
It was but the other day she and Miss
Sidney of Ash-Park were playing in
their white frocks together.—I remem-
ber I often used to milk them a syllabub
under the cow when I lived at Ash-
Park.”

“ Did you live at Ash-Park?” said
I, hardly articulate.

“ Aye,

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 175

“ Aye, that I did, seven long years. I lived there when the good 'Squire Sidney was married to his dear first lady, now in heaven :—she was the sweetest —Well—Why, I have had Miss Sidney in these very arms a hundred times. —She was all life and spirits, and would hold out her little arms to come to me.”

I got up, and went to the window to hide my emotion; but the good woman saw it not, being busy with her distaff.

“ Aye—aye—poor young gentlewoman, I wonder how she likes this new

father-in-law that Madam have lately married.—Mercy on me!—When I heard of the match, my poor heart did ache for very trouble.—Well—to be sure, I said it was a wicked lie; for that old Madam could never be so given up to folly:—and this young spark is a wild one, I hear.—Mercy on us! to think that all that timber, for every tree there belongs to poor Miss Sidney, should be hacked and hewed about into ducks and drakes, is enough to drive one silly.”

I was greatly affected at this interesting harangue. “Miss Sidney, said I, is much obliged to you, and would
thank

thank you, I am convinced, could she ever know the sincere good wish you bear her."

"Aye, blessings on her; I wish her a good husband and soon. I have not seen her this many a day; but I hear as how she is grown up to be a fine handsome lady; but as to old Madam, time has not mended her.—Well, I will say no more, but go down and press my cheefe curd."



It is no small mortification to your Lucy, that she cannot send this, and

obtain an answer from her Harriet, whilst she stays here ; but both are equally impossible. To-morrow morning I intend leaving this sweet retreat : the stage coaches pass at the very bottom of the little garden ; so I shall not have far to walk. To London I propose going ; but, as I am above an hundred miles from thence, and not used to the fatigue of travelling in a stage coach, perhaps I may stop by the way, if I should meet with a retired situation. Here then will I close for the present. At the first post town through which I pass, I shall send this enormous packet to my faithful, and much-loved friend ; and again imploring, and depending on the aid of that gracious Providence who

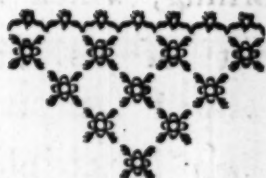
never

HISTORY OF Miss SIDNEY. 179

never fails the sincere invoker, I subscribe myself, however distant, or how long absent,

Your ever tenderly affectionate,

Lucy.



Miss SIDNEY to Miss WOODLEY.

From M——, a large Town in ——

YOU have, my dear Harriet, before now, I hope, received my last immense packet. I told you I should leave sweet Beech-wood Farm the next morning, which I did, to the infinite regret of its kind inhabitants.

As I know you wish me to be very minute, I will proceed with an account of my journey, and safe arrival at this place.

place. You see by the date of this I could not reach London. The first day's journey greatly fatigued me, and as I found I had a bad cold coming on, I thought it much wiser to stay here a week at least. In a town so large and populous, I am sufficiently private. I am also safely situated, and happily with civil good people.—But to proceed with my journey to this place.

The morning of my departure from my rural retreat, I was escorted by my kind old dame, and her train of grand-children, (one of whom would carry my small bundle, another my gloves) to the end of the lane adjoining the house, at the hour of the coaches passing

passing by. The first coach which came was entirely empty, a circumstance I was not sorry for. Into that therefore I got, after a hundred shakes of the hand, and blessings bestowed upon me by the good old woman.

The coach stopped at breakfast-time about fifteen miles from Beech-wood. Here, I was told, another passenger was to be taken up on his way to London. A grave, elderly man, now made his appearance, and handing me into the coach with much civility, seated himself by me. I held down my head, fancying that every body knew me, and and that every body looked at me.— There is an old saying, that a “guilty
consci-

conscience, &c.” This, however, I could not apply to myself; for my cause was not only innocent, but meritorious. Alas! my Harriet, how must the guilty tremble, when the innocent suffer the perturbations from mere timid apprehension I then did?—But I must here tell you of a *prudent* (as I imagined) precaution of mine, which came into my head, as I was sitting by myself at the inn at breakfast. I thought it would be best and *safest* to pass for a *married* woman, as I imagined I might be less liable in that respectable character to any impertinence, or free kind of behaviour during my journey (and as long as I judged proper afterwards) than if I was to appear
(as

(as I really am) a single young creature, unfriended and alone. You know, my Harriet, every kind of deception I detest, but you must allow this was a very innocent one. What favoured this thought was, that I happened to have in my purse, with an old seal of my dear mother's, her wedding ring, which I had ever carefully preserved: this ring then, I put on the proper finger. I also pulled off my red cloak and stuff gown, as I feared, to appear on so long a journey, in so mean a dress, I might be subject to insults from low people. I therefore dressed myself in a clean linen gown I had in my bundle, procured a neat capuchin and black hat, so that I made the decent appearance

ance of a middling gentlewoman:—my name, if it was asked, I intended to be *Johnson*; and that my husband was gone abroad.—In short, “*I changed my name to increase my consequence,*” which motive, I fear, in reality, is too often the cause of so many unhappy, ridiculous marriages we daily see.—But to proceed with my journey.

I was now seated in the coach with this grave old gentleman by my side, who by his dress I imagined to be a clergyman. He was perfectly silent, and from the deep sighs which often escaped him, I imagined his spirits were as much oppressed as my own. The swiftness of the carriage which was
con-

186 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
conveying me at once into a wide world,
into which in my unfriended destitute
condition, I should infallibly be sub-
ject to a hundred nameless distresses, if
not insults; my helpless state; the num-
berless fears and apprehensions which
now rushed into my trembling heart,
joined with the melancholy thought
that every moment carried me still fur-
ther from my dearest Harriet, the friend
of my soul; all these reflections uniting
so agitated my mind, that forgetting for
a moment, I was *not* alone, I burst
into tears; and casting up my stream-
ing eyes, this emphatic exclamation
broke from me; "O God, look down
and protect me!"

The

The good man, who sat by my side, seemed surprized; and with the most compassionate, benign countenance, addressed me. "You will, I hope, Madam, pardon a stranger's interfering in begging you, be your afflictions what they will, to endeavour to resign yourself to that Almighty Being, whom you just now so properly, and so fervently implored. Be comforted, my good young woman (for such you appear to be) be satisfied that you will not, that you cannot be wholly unhappy as long as you place an implicit trust and confidence in his unbounded mercies, who in his own good time will either grant our wishes (if laudable) or deliver us from our miseries, by a thousand methods

thods which mock our feeble foresight. We are all of us apt to make unfair comparisons, and to imagine, that our afflictions always exceed those of others. Alas! how many at this instant are sinking in the devouring flood, or more devouring flame!—How many are pining in want, shut up from the common air, in filth, hunger, and darkness!—How many drink the cup of adversity, and eat the bitter bread of misery!—How many poor shivering wretches have not even so much as the most sordid hut wherein to lay their head!—But— even what are these calamities, dreadful as they are, to the fiercer torments of the mind, to madness, to ——— O heavens!”—Here the worthy man burst
into

into tears. "Alas! my good young woman, (continued he, taking my hand) you will pardon, I hope, this free address in a man, father of children older than yourself.—How trifling, how inconsiderable, must appear the common evils of this life, when compared to the heart-felt anguish under which I am struggling.—O my poor Fanny!—my unhappy, distracted child!—but I am coming to thee as fast as my aged limbs will suffer me."

Here his tears choaked all utterance.
—O Harriet, how I wept!

"Most worthy Sir, said I, take those heavenly comforts to your own aid you have

have been so kindly recommending to me. Alas! do not weep (my heart was indeed torn with anguish to see his venerable cheek covered with tears)—let me presume, young as I am, to remind you, that the all gracious Providence looks down with pity, when we are often lost even to hope. Your sufferings, I am convinced, from the melancholy hint you just gave, are so much superior to mine, that I am almost ashamed of the tears I have shed, except those which still flow from compassion, Sir, for you.”

“ Sentiments so humane and uncommon (he was pleased to say) at so early an age, merit both my regard and admiration.

miration. But, my good young lady, that you may not think I murmur against that Providence I revere, and as your compassion for my irremediable misfortune, demands on my side the most open and explicit confidence. You will, I am persuaded, think those tears not shed on a trifling occasion, when I inform you, Madam, I have at this unhappy hour, a daughter, young and amiable (he was pleased to say) as yourself, who is, O heavens! do I live to relate it?—in the most pitiable state of all human misery.—She is—O Madam! my poor child, the darling of my heart, is confined in a private mad-house at Chelsea, in a state of absolute distraction.”

“ Was

“ Was it a fever, Sir, or what other cause was it that brought on this dreadful calamity? (said I, even sobbing) —but pardon my impertinence —.”

“ Impertinence! my excellent young lady! call it not so.—Your tender enquiry demands the sad tale, which in as few words as possible I will endeavour to relate.—I am a country clergyman, who with a small living in a cheap part of England, have by frugal management, had quite sufficient to give my family (two sons and a daughter) an education suited to their circumstances; and at the same time I had always something to spare to feed the hungry, and to relieve the widow and
father-

fatherless. My two boys, by the help of good friends, are both at this moment in his majesty's service, in the army, in the West Indies, and I hope will be an honour to their country.— My daughter,—ah, cutting reflection! —my sweet Fanny,—the delight of all who knew her, was about two years since, at the house of a neighbouring gentleman, (a man of large fortune) who had daughters nearly of the age of mine. About that time his only son returned from his travels, of whom, to do justice to his merit, I can only say, his uncommon virtues and attainments do honour to the human race. He soon became passionately fond of my then lovely child— (forgive an old

man's doating tenderness), which on her part was returned with a mutual affection. The father of the young gentleman soon perceived the growing attachment, and most sharply reprimanded his son on the occasion, with a strict prohibition, on pain of his eternal displeasure, never to see or correspond with my daughter, or even to entertain a single thought farther on the subject. The unhappy girl was sent home, with a letter from the old gentleman addressed to me, acquainting me with the whole affair, and with his absolute disapprobation, and refusal of an alliance of this kind. He was my patron, and had always been an extraordinary friend, having just before obtained

com-

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 195

commissions in the army for my boys. Gratitude, therefore, and honour, demanded that I should forbid all clandestine meetings between the young folks. My daughter, soon after her return home, was seized with a low kind of fever, which fell on her spirits. I tried a change of air and amusements; nay, even went to the utmost of my small income to procure her a journey to Bristol; but alas! those healing waters had no effect on the malady of my poor child, which had taken too deep a root; though to relieve a parent's grief, how often would the sweet girl, her eyes shining in tears, with a smile assure me (just to cheat my anguish) that she was daily getting better! My

patron still continued inflexible, and to preclude every latest hope, ordered his son to prepare for a voyage with General ——— to the East Indies. In vain did the worthy youth beg, even on his knees, for one parting interview, one last farewell, from his beloved Fanny; in vain did his amiable sisters plead likewise; the request was sternly denied.—I cannot dwell on this cruel period, any more than to say, the most excellent of young men was hurried to London, and from thence on ship-board. From the day the parting interview was absolutely refused, my poor child became visibly altered: she neither spoke, nor slept, and refused all sustenance. A most profound and
deep

deep melancholy seized her already weakened mind, which was not to be diverted; and she sometimes fell into the most shocking of all hysteric effects, violent fits of laughter. I watched over her day and night with anguish unutterable. My poor wife not being able longer to support the heart-felt grief, took to her bed:—and I (but O God thy will be done) had added to my other affliction, the inexpressible concern of losing the best of women.—She died in these arms.”

“ O, Sir, spare the melancholy recital (said I weeping) it is too much.”

“ Well, Madam—to be brief. Every thing in medicine was tried for my poor child, but all in vain. A relation I have in London, begged she might be put under the immediate inspection of Doctor Monro. Accordingly she was placed at a private house for that purpose at Chelsea: but alas! a long year has elapsed, without the least hope of amendment. Sometimes raving, at other times weeping in silence.—O, Madam, pity an old father’s anguish!—When I last visited her melancholy retreat, she knew me not; but running wildly to me, demanded—Pray, Sir, can you tell me news of my poor Billy? They have hurried him strangely from me—but I will tell you all.—O heavens!

vens! my poor child!—my Fanny!—
the delight of every one!”

“ I beg, Sir, (said I, weeping) you
will not proceed. Indeed my heart is
affected to the last degree.—Good God!
What is any sorrow in this world, when
compared with yours !”

Here we were both silent ;—tears, on
both sides, preventing utterance.

“ I will only add (said the good
man, after wiping his venerable cheek)
that I am now going to carry her back
to my own house, as I cannot live with-

out daily knowing how she goes on.—

The father of the young gentleman, I hear, begins now to repent he has carried matters so high:—but alas! what now avails his relenting?—Now, that the peace of my sweet child is ruined for ever; and his valuable son removed to the farther part of the globe!”

“ Come, Sir, (said I) let us hope the best:—*time* may, perhaps, and I doubt not will, contribute to the relief of the unhappy sufferer.—I really think there is still a prospect of her being happy.”

“ Ah, never! (said the worthy man) grief, and the continual anxiety I labour

bour

hour under, will soon bring my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave."

O, Harriet, how was my heart torn with anguish at his wretched and most affecting story! And how apt are we to arraign Providence, and think ourselves compleatly miserable, and lost even to hope, if the least trifle crosses our wishes; if we are not gratified with the indulgence of every fancy, however vain and irregular!

I found my heart so warmly interested in the afflictions of this worthy man, and his wretched daughter, that I begged to be acquainted with the name of a person for whom I told him

I should ever preserve a high respect. He hesitated not, but frankly told me it was Wilson, and added likewise the name of his village, and in what county his parsonage lies. He had the politeness not to press to know the cause of those afflictions I had hinted at, which had brought on the affecting account of his; and it hurt me not a little, that I was under a necessity of concealing my real name and circumstances, from a man so worthy, that I am convinced he merited my utmost confidence.—I gave him, however, to understand, that I hoped at some future period we might renew our acquaintance, which I firmly intend to do, if Providence should ever place me
in

in a happier situation than I am in at present.—Ah, my dear, the distresses of Mr. Wilson will, I hope, teach me not to repine at unavoidable trifling ills!

We now saw before us the town we were to dine at, and soon after found our carriage stop at the gate of a large inn, where the first object which presented itself was the most impertinent coxcomb I ever beheld. He offered to hand me out of the coach; and informed us, “though not used to travel in
“a stage coach, he was once going,
“in his life, for the sake of *novelty*,
“to divert himself with a journey in
“a *machine* to London.” Mr. Wilson

just stepping out of the room where we dined, this coxcomb exclaimed, turning to me with great familiarity, "O heavens! my charming girl, what a disagreeable morning must you have endured, pent up in a stage coach, with this old putt of a country parson!—We shall have fine fun with him in the afternoon."—I gave him a look of the utmost contempt, and thought him not worth an answer.—I soon took an opportunity also of displaying, as if by accident, the *wedding* ring on my left hand, which had the desired effect; for it so far put a stop to his impertinence, that not another word proceeded from his lips, which he might not have uttered to his
grand-

grandmother. Thus, my dear, you see my little stratagem succeeded in this my first attempt, and I hope I shall have no reason to repent of it in any future one. I hate every kind of deception as much as you do, but this is so very innocent, and withal so necessary I think in my present situation, that I hope you will not disapprove it.

For the remainder of my journey that afternoon, I had so violent a pain in my head, and found so bad a cold coming on, with symptoms of a sore throat, that I seriously determined, at all events, to stay at the town we were then going to that night, till I should
be

be perfectly recovered, and able to pursue my journey. But do not, my Harriet, be frightened, for my disorder is very trifling.

When the coach stopped at the inn, I declared my intention of being left behind, much to the regret of good Mr. Wilson, who took a kind leave of me, and I of him. The fop observed a most contemptuous silence, and but just nodded his head; for, as I was a *married woman*, you know, all civility was at an end:—neither, had he the common good manners to hand me out of the coach. I desired the hostess to send a servant with me, to some reputable person in the town of her acquaintance,

quaintance, who should procure me a small retired lodging for a short time, which she accordingly did, and I most luckily hired an apartment at once, quite to my satisfaction, at the house of a good-natured obliging woman, who lives in a very decent manner. My room is very neatly furnished, and commands a most beautiful prospect (as it is situated in the back part of the house) over some pleasant gardens, and of the adjacent hills in the country. I am as much *secreted* here, as if I was two hundred miles off; and no person in the house but my landlady, who is a Mrs. Mills, and one maid. Here then, I shall find leisure to recollect my scattered thoughts; to fix on some
future

future plan for my support, and to recover myself from a cold, which has hung upon me some time.—But do not, my Harriet, think, I am *ill*, for indeed I am not. I have told Mrs. Mills, that I shall not stir out of my room, so have agreed with her to send me up a plate always from her table; and that I shall chuse to sit much alone, having letters to write. This I thought it best to say at once. The good woman stared. She is, I find, obliging to *excess*; her only foible (too common a one, the men say, in our sex) is an unbounded exuberance of tongue. She says, she is glad she knows my *ways*, and that she will intrude upon my *privacy* (was her word) as little as possible.

In

In few words I informed her my married name (God forgive me) is Johnson; and that my husband is now in the East Indies.—“ Ah! poor gentlewoman (said the good woman) it must be *heart-breaking* to part with him.”—She begged to know if there was a little Miss, or Master.—But enough of her for the present.—Adieu! my Harriet. I need not say that I most impatiently long to hear from you, as I am, and shall ever be,

Most faithfully, your's,

LUCY.

Miss

Miss WOODLEY to Miss SIDNEY, under Cover, to Mrs. JOHNSON.

Woodley-House,

My dearest Friend,

THE joy of hearing you are in a place of safety, after the dreadful dangers you escaped, can be felt, but never described by your poor Harriet, who has suffered the most painful anxiety for the beloved friend of her soul.—Heaven only knows what I have endured!—But are you really safe?—O my sweet girl, nothing but your being an eye-witness can sufficiently express

press the perturbations of mind I suffer for you:—an hundred times I read over the kind affecting account of your escape;—a thousand and a thousand times I lament, that I have it not in my power to afford you personal protection:—then, falling on my knees, I implore the further aid of the Almighty power, whose chiefest care is suffering innocence:—I supplicate every guardian angel to protect, in unsullied purity, a virtue so exalted as thine is, and to keep it far from the reach of farther violence.

It must be imagined your escape, so glorious to yourself, has much astonished every one, who cannot be acquainted

quainted with the dreadful occasion: but every creature I have seen are all so prejudiced in your favour (for surely to *know* and *love* you is the same) that they all think you met with some ill usage from either lady Beaumont, or the vile wretch she has married:—every mouth is open to pity my excellent friend.—Old Miss Claypole, indeed, who has, you know, stuck at forty these twenty years, drew herself up yesterday when she called upon me, and with a puffed-up mouth,—“was very certain a *lover* must have been in the case. So *young* a creature to take *such* a step, was imprudence in the extreme. But it was the sin of the age, and therefore not to be wondered at.”—

In

In short, my dear, you would have been as much diverted with her sple-
netic ill-nature as I was.

The day of your departure, servants
were dispatched a hundred different
ways in search of my angelic friend.
The abominable Sir Harry (though I
hear he only *assumes* that title) affected
to be under great astonishment, and
joined the search. O my Lucy, it was
the particular providence evidently of
the Almighty, that directed you to the
cottage at Beech-wood; where you were
secreted at the very time they were
searching that, and every other part of
the county. Lady Beaumont has kept
her room ever since, partly for vexa-
tion,

tion, and partly from chagrin, at her vile husband's behaviour; who has, I hear, two or three companions come from London as wicked and profligate as himself.—O my sweet friend, I tremble lest they are meditating some future scheme to search you out! But your prudence is so admirable, your caution and vigilance so unwearied, that all advice on this head is unnecessary.

I grieve that you are indisposed:—but are you *very* ill?—I hope not:—indeed I cannot support the thought of your being in a bad state of health, and quite among strangers.—Tell me, my Lucy, satisfy me, as soon as possible,
that

that you are better.—I tremble too lest your money should not hold out.—
Alas! my sweet girl, what will ten pounds do?—and if sickness should happen, how are you to be assisted? Indeed, my Lucy, I am above measure unfortunate, that I have not one shilling in the world I can at this time command, to send you; for my brother Jack, who has, I believe, since he went last to Oxford, out-run his allowance, has privately begged me to remit him all the cash I was mistress of, to pay some of his debts; and for that purpose my affection for him carried me so far as to take up my half-year's allowance before it was due:—and I even stripped myself, to the *confiscation*
of

of my last guinea, to assist him.—You see, my dear, my distress.—I hope I need not say, that every thing I can command is *yours*. I have two diamond rings, and the diamond ear-rings which were my grand-mother's, which I will send at a moment's warning to you, if you think the disposal of them will help to support, or put you in any little way of business.—Do tell me, that I may send them.—Come, my dear, you will live happily yet, I doubt not; and we shall laugh over these scenes at some future, happy period. Who knows but I may yet see my admirable friend in her coach and six, and in the possession of her undoubted right, the old mansion of Ash-Park, sacred to hospitality

talities and benevolence? — As to this vile Sir Harry, I hope I shall live to hear he is hanged at Tyburn, which by all accounts he ought to have been some years ago; and as for the poor deceived woman, his wife, he will soon torment her into her grave.

I think your intention of staying where you are a short time, to consider of some future plan, a good thought; especially as you are with a civil, worthy woman. — It is absolutely impossible you should be discovered: and your being in a town which is on the great road to London, is a convenient circumstance.

You ask my opinion about your *cautious* expedient of passing for a married

L

woman

woman.—Why, my dear, I do not know what to say to it, more than that I think every, the most innocent deception, *wrong*, in *some* degree. And I have often observed, however praiseworthy the *motive*, it has been (if not always) yet commonly attended with troublesome, inconvenient circumstances:—and most heartily do I wish you may not, some time or other, repent this little, though, I am sure, most innocent fallacy.—I own I am always, much for the plain path that is set before us.—But now you have taken upon you this name and character, you must go through with it;—and so, Mrs. *Johnson*, I wish you good success.

Alas! my Lucy, your situation, though distressful, is less melancholy than

than thousands at this day experience. You are *innocent*—think of *that* ;—think of the poor distracted Fanny Wilson.—I wept a full hour at her affecting story.—I could have almost wished you had settled yourself with the excellent man her father ; but Providence orders all for the best. What would I give to be with my Lucy ! My state, heaven knows, is disagreeable to a great degree. Confined to the sick chamber of my feeble uncle, and my aunt, who is recovering from her dreadful distemper, seems to be, if possible, more peevish than ever :—my Lucy too is absent,—and, heaven knows, if ever we may meet again !—But yet I will hope,

“ That sweet relief, the healing hand of heaven,

“ Alone, to suffering innocence has given.”

Write,

Write, my beloved friend, as soon as possible.—Continue to be very minute. Tell me you are perfectly recovered, and that, in all changes and chances, you will ever remain mine, as I invariably shall,

Most faithfully, yours,

HARRIET.

P. S. I insist on your telling me if those diamonds I have mentioned, will be of the least service. Do, my dear, give me the pleasure of sending them.—Alas! what will (I repeat) ten pounds avail?

End of the FIRST VOLUME.

